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*THOUGHTS ON DEATH AND LIFE*

*The Engersoll Lecture on  
the Immortality of Man  
Harvard University, 1936*

MEANINGS OF DEATH

*and*

*The Hiram W. Thomas Lecture  
University of Chicago, 1936*

MEANINGS OF LIFE

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# THOUGHTS ON DEATH AND LIFE

BY

WILLIAM ERNEST HOCKING



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THOUGHTS ON DEATH AND LIFE

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*To*

ARCHIBALD ALLAN BOWMAN

*Strong, fervent, knightly spirit  
who saw the vastness  
of common things.*



# CONTENTS

<i>PREFACE</i>	ix
I. <i>MEANINGS OF DEATH</i>	
Prologue	3
I. Incredulity Toward Death	5
II. Positive Meanings of Death	12
III. Logical Preliminaries	27
<i>a. Unnecessary impediments</i>	
<i>b. The mind and its body</i>	
IV. A Dilemma of World Structure	51
V. The Principle of Duality	62
<i>a. The self and the subconscious</i>	
<i>b. Traits of the two selves</i>	
VI. Further Meanings of Death	86
VII. What Ought to Be	97
Epilogue	112
II. <i>INTERLUDE: A SYMPOSIUM ON THE MEANING OF LIFE</i>	
I. The Worth of Mere Being Alive	117
II. Worth in Doing and in Things Done	123
III. Worth in Love and Appreciation	126
IV. Worth in Serving Causes: a Union of Love and Power	132
V. Worth in Fulfilling a Destiny	136
VI. The Paradoxes of Meaning	139

# CONTENTS

## III. MEANINGS OF LIFE

I. Thought and Sanity	145
II. Logical Preliminaries	155
III. Science and Imagination	164
IV. The Experiment of Western Civilization	174
V. How Attachment Requires Detachment	185
1. The Conception of God	
<i>a. The illusion of local value</i>	186
<i>b. The general principle of relativity in regard to values</i>	187
<i>c. Concrete objectivity</i>	188
2. The Continuance of Life	
<i>d. The law of empirical otherness</i>	193
<i>e. Temporal otherness, or beyondness</i>	197
<i>f. Continuity of historic reference</i>	200
VI. Meanings of Life: Myth and Reality	205
VII. Conclusion: Mystic and Realist	217

## IV. APPENDIX: BIOLOGY AND THE MEANING OF HUMAN LIFE

I. The Emergence of Life	235
II. The Emergence of Mind	240
III. How Mind Subserves the Supposed Ends of Nature	243
IV. How Nature Subserves the Supposed Ends of Mind	246
V. On What Conditions Can Man Retain Significance?	251



## PREFACE

THESE brief meditations on great themes make no pretence to be adequate. They are serious in intent and, I believe, pertinent to the present stage of thinking about the meaning of human life and its destiny. But it will not require an experienced eye to see signs of unfinishedness. They retain much of the character of the conversations and of the two lectures out of which they arose,—the Ingersoll Lecture given at Harvard University on April 21, 1936 and the Thomas Lecture given at the University of Chicago on May 14, 1936. For the sake of clarity I have expanded the text somewhat beyond that of the lectures as delivered. I have not attempted to avoid a few repetitions: they too may add something to clarity and will at least register the truth that the meaning of life and the meaning of death are inseparable.

If the brevity of the book requires justification it is in substance the same as that of the spoken words on which it is based. They were addressed to actual questions: and an actual question may remain as effectively unan-

swered if it is replied to at theoretically ample length as if the response is delayed until it can be perfect. If one is asked abruptly, "What do you now think about death? or of the immortality of man? or of the total sense of human life?", assuredly one's first impulse is silence; nevertheless, there may be that in the temper or need out of which the demand comes to cancel that impulse and require an offering of the state of one's reasonings at the moment. One need not profess finality; he must acknowledge the darkness which borders the edge of his exploring range, and also invades it. But there exist current errors which can be rectified. And there are dogmatic, seeming-scientific negations which are at least as footless as dogmatic affirmations and whose vulnerability it may be at this moment even more imperative to expose.

There are no concerns which more pervasively affect human happiness and sanity, both at the conscious and at the subconscious level, than these issues with which we are here dealing: my aim is to remove some of the needless obstacles to a just judgment.

WILLIAM ERNEST HOCKING

Cambridge, Massachusetts,

January 7, 1937.

## *MEANINGS OF DEATH*



## PROLOGUE

THE problem of the survival of death by human persons is an empirical problem for which we have no empirical evidence. It is a question of fact, and of fact in time, for which there are no antecedent probabilities one way or the other. Human survival is neither probable nor improbable, because we have to approach it through those same questions of world order which include the basis of probability.

As a philosophical problem, it is a secondary chapter, a corollary of other views, such as the structure of the world, the existence of a God interested in persons, freedom, the relation of mind and body. It is a last chapter, or perhaps an appendix, of the usual system of metaphysics.

Hence it is a theme in which many people have lost interest because they have taken their answer, Yes or No, with their general world-view. It is settled in the affirmative or (more frequently today) in the negative by what they otherwise believe; it is no longer a

#### 4    *THOUGHTS ON DEATH AND LIFE*

question—and if it were, not a separate question.

The function of this discussion is not to prove immortality, nor to disprove it. It is to shake ourselves out of sophistication about it, to disturb customary attitudes in an effort to see afresh the nature of the question, to estimate its importance or unimportance, to get once more its original impact on the mind of the self-conscious creature, in the hope of arriving at a clearer total perception of what is significant and what is possible.

I propose that we approach the problem from the obverse side, by way of the meanings of death.

## I

### INCREDULITY TOWARD DEATH

**M**AN is the only animal that contemplates death, and also the only animal that shows any sign of doubt of its finality. This does not mean that he doubts it as a future fact. He accepts his own death, with that of others, as inevitable, plans for it, provides for the time when he shall be out of the picture. Yet, not less today than formerly, he confronts this fact with a certain incredulity regarding the scope of its destruction.

This incredulity is due partly but not wholly to his wishes. It is first of all a phase of the general suspicion with which all obvious judgments about human destiny come to be regarded: the philosopher who offers the plain and primary facts presented in sensation and perception as also the final facts seems to the plain man the truly credulous person.

And in the special article of death, he has from his own self-consciousness an item which

proves nothing, but which intimates a possibility. As a witness of death, now and then the death of a friend, he finds in himself a double response, not a single one: he is defeated in the most signal manner by the physical forces out of which human life emerges—he appreciates this defeat; and it is just then, when the evidence is most complete, that he experiences a vague and hesitant resurgence of confidence. It is as if that defeat were the experience necessary to remind him of something in himself which his every-day self-awareness overlooks, something which at one point breaks through the closed frame of “nature,” holds its own in independence of what happens within “nature,” and which might conceivably jut out immune beyond the catastrophe of death. In this contradictory eddy of emotion which psychologists well understand—if analogies constitute understanding—the scientific conscience is prone to see perversity. The common man however protests that he is not being led by his emotion; that his emotion is rather a result than a cause; that he has been admitted to a momentary glimpse of objective fact in the structure of things; and that it is this fact which justifies



him in ascribing to his wishes in this region a modest evidential value.

So far as wish enters into the situation, it is clear that the wish is not primarily for himself. It takes the form of a demand that someone else, whose death has been witnessed, shall not have perished from the universe. Attachments have been broken off, the emotional habits of life have been thwarted, but the protest is not levelled against this personal pain. It is levelled against the destruction of something admirable. It has little or nothing in common with the demand found by Kant in human conscience, calling for endless time in which this moral self may become perfect! On the contrary, it is a cry that life *has produced* the perfect being, beloved by me, and has thrown it away. I care enough for that appearance to carve it into imperishable stone, yet nature lets the living original perish! It is a protest which moves far beyond personal suffering and expresses outrage at an objective unfitness.

Thus the notion of survival arises far more as a claim of right than as a personal wish. It is based less on the law of individual duty than on the right of affection and an aesthetic

justice. It is conceived as the obligation of the universe to us before it is our duty to the universe.

The interest in survival has another noteworthy peculiarity. Most desires are desires for specific objects. This desire is not for an object, but for a subject. It contemplates in the first instance, not the satisfaction of any wish, but the continuance of wishing and of the wisher.

In this respect it is like the will to live, which has no definite object of pursuit, but merely drives toward the maintenance of the consciousness of objects-in-general, and is therefore sometimes put down by psychologists as a piece of mythology. But the fact is there: the extraordinary concern which men commonly show in mere being-alive, regardless of whether the actual contents of experience are pleasant or unpleasant. Surgeons now recognize that beside the dread of pain, which anaesthesia was invoked to allay, and the further dread of the knife, which anaesthesia can partially displace, there is a distinct dread of anaesthesia itself, a dread of being put out of the reach of one's aliveness, which in some persons is strong enough to lead them to pre-

fer the undimmed pain of an operation. It is a paradoxical interest in consciousness itself as distinct from the contents of consciousness—a distinction which has its own scientific value.

Is this empty interest irrational? It may seem a vestige of unintelligent animal tenacity-of-life; yet we reflect that unless there are subjects and knowers in the world, there are either no values at all, or else no takers for such values as might be conceived to exist. We might imagine, as among the possible worlds, one particularly hard world in which every particular human wish up to the present moment has been disappointed; yet that world, taken in its entire sweep, need be neither hopeless nor meaningless. But a world devoid of conscious subjects is necessarily a meaningless world. An interest in the survival of conscious subjects, merely in their capacity as necessary conditions for conserving the meaning of things, may well be an instinctive sign of a deeper rationality.

So far, I am concerned merely to point out some of the motives of the belief in survival of death, and to clear our minds of the prevalent

but absurd notion that it is based on wishes alone or on wishes essentially selfish.

But we ought also to note that incredulity toward death is only partial; and that notions of survival, reinforced by crowd consciousness and enshrined in the bold assertions of religion, are in most persons only half-sure of themselves, and therefore subject to an alternate Yes and No.

The early men who first conceived survival lost the courage of their affections, and dampened down their idea of the surviving spirit into the melancholy picture of a ghost. And later men, conspiring to preserve intact the perishing memories of the dead, substituted for the flickering medium of remembrance the assumed stabilities of wood, stone, bronze. The physical monument appeared a safer basis of endurance than the mental fact upon its own ground. It is no small part of the pathos of the mortuary customs of all religions—this mute element of doubt which infects the heart of faith, and makes the Christian cemetery a vast invocation of matter to support the hesitant certainties of the immaterial.

The natural attitude toward death remains

thus double and antithetical. At one moment we say, Death is an appearance and not an end. At the next, Death is real and final, it is fantastic to think otherwise. No doctrine of survival in any case escapes the universal fact of death, nor the suffering that goes with it: these remain the data of every argument.

## II

### POSITIVE MEANINGS OF DEATH

**I**F THERE is to be any chance of seeing beyond death, we must first be able to see death as it is. And to see death truly, we must recognize what meaning it has both for the race and for the individual who dies.

It is customary to look upon death as un-mixed evil, perhaps the severest of evils. Pessimists have taken it as their crowning argument, forgetting that if life is an evil, death which is only the expunging of life must be a good. But if life is a good, as for common consciousness it is, and if in death the self comes to nothing and remains forever nothing for itself, then death must be the major calamity. And if the final state of things gives us the lasting sum of their values, we can hardly avoid the reflection of Tolstoi, that an ultimate annihilation sends its shadow backward and cancels the worth of every present achievement. Religion reflects the universal feeling

of the evil of death when it calls it the wages of sin.

922086 But if death is the price of anything, biological death, it is the price not of sin but of love. For if men by way of love are to beget new generations of men continually, the old must pass. The world-room is finite; without perennial death there could be no perennial appearance of childhood. Without childhood, love which is transmission, and whose greatest joy is the handing-on of life, would be choked in its beginnings. Love is the distant acceptance and celebration of one's own transiency. And death, when it comes, should be the glad remembrance and celebration of love.

468 For the race, death means flexibility in the changes of history. Death renders it unnecessary to be forever educating old men to new ways; for as the old men pass, their rigid formulae pass with them. A suit of armor cast in long pieces—even flexible pieces—is an enemy to agility; but made of tiny flakes or links—even if each one is inflexible—it lends itself to all the supple bendings of the body. Were Adam, Noah, Socrates, Con-

fucius still among us, how we would weary of the daily rumor of their views upon the affairs of the moment: would not a certain sense of fair play bring about a conspiracy to ignore them, so that contemporary voices might sound out with due sonority and weight? If there were no natural death, society might well be driven to institute some form of artificial death, such as an honorable ostracism, lest the cumulative weight of great authority hold all new-arriving tongues locked in deference and thwart their arrival at maturity through the exercise of responsible opinion.

It is not merely that the old become static—that need not be the case—but they frequently become wise and prudent. And life must progress in part by the imprudence of those who undertake the impossible, not knowing what they do. It is death which insures that the reins shall leave sagacious and experienced hands and come to the unwisdom of youth, with the large probability of new ills but also of a modicum of good otherwise unattainable.

Without death, the inequalities of age alone would become monstrous, and the



growing emotional disparity between ancients and beginners insupportable. And so far as there operates in society the rule that to him that hath shall be given, all the geometrically-growing advantages of power and prestige require a natural terminus if they are not to destroy the access of man to man on which society rests. They find this terminus in the democracy of death: a rude mechanical justice, operating without noise, incessantly reduces to common dust all the mounting conquests of personal prowess and distributes their yield to new hands. And if men incline to the opinion that such and such great figure is indispensable, death furnishes the experimental proof that no man is necessary to the race, and so the sanity of the species, always running to the ease and vicarious elevations of hero-worship, is from time to time restored.

Further, the fact that life has a time-limit allows it to have shape and character. Its work can be summed and considered as a whole: it stands for an identifiable something.

Retain Plato in life for two thousand years, growing and producing great works as

a Plato must until he parallels the entire history of western thought—for what, then, in our minds could Plato stand, and who could think or write about Plato? Biography is baffled unless a life, limited like a work of art, becomes in some sense the song of its own time, having indeed an epoch of its own, and a limited output into the public treasury. It is with the death of an artist that his work first begins to find its valuation and its historic emplacement.

The vessel which contains a life remains plastic and unfinished, until death—having its whole contents—rounds-in its end; then one can speak of the quality of that life and of the shape of that vessel; and these become the meaning to the world of that personal name. Perhaps we may say that the thing we call “individuality” is not a pre-existing fact but rather a possibility until death finishes the definition. Then alone is this person a complete qualitative fact, distinct from every other.

These considerations among many give death a positive value to the world at large as it witnesses the coming and going of its members. Humanity as a procession is better

than humanity as a fixture; and flux, even in the sphere of values, appears to have superiority over the ancient category of substance.

But to the individual who dies, or who is to die—what can death mean to him? It is a matter of course that each individual imbibes the general view of death current in his society: if this current view is resigned to his passing, it becomes him as a man to assume the same attitude; and most men successfully do so, partly because the general view comes to them first and with the vastest possible authority, since all but himself can think of his death as the death of an *other*. But to the dier, his own death is a lonely experience which society, unable to enter, is to this extent disqualified to judge. The partial philosophic reconciliation of the social mind to his own disappearance must, while it alleviates, contribute also an added pang, and emphasize the solitude of the event.

We must note that the belief in one's own death is an acquired and usually a late belief, not at all a native one. The immediate feeling of life touches no limit either of beginning or end: to be alive is to expect that each next

moment will be followed by another. Consciousness is not a targeted attention to instantly present data alone; it is also a reaching forward and backward in time, relating what is to what was and to what is coming. And the logic of this character of consciousness is apparent: since it can only exist as time-spinning in this way, a moment which had no next moment would not be a conscious moment. Hence a last moment of consciousness (as well as a first moment) is logically impossible. Neither terminus of life can be experienced; and neither can be realized in imagination. Hence the belief which every mature man acquires that his own death will come, is an intellectual adoption, not an intuitive faith.

This situation explains something of that incredulity which we first remarked, and which continues to attend one's thought of his own death, even if it is banished from the general thought of human destiny. But the common mortality of man must eventually come home to every Socrates. And with the first shock of the deduction, which has the force of a painful discovery, that I, too, shall die, there comes a stern practical consequence

—a tendency to curb my farther-reaching purposes and to deal anxiously with time as with an infinitely precious because absolutely limited quantity.

Here one finds the first positive value of his own death. For it is only through this reflection that one realizes the nature of time.

To have endless time to squander on each task leaves one a stranger to the instancy of the moment—its once-onlyness, its *Einmaligkeit*! To perceive that the number of available “nows” is finite and that no “now” recurs is to know what temporal quality is, irreversible, undetainable, inexorable. The “present” assumes an office—it becomes recognized as the invisible portal through which Destiny enters, and silently, under my hands takes on unalterable shapes. I begin to consider a certain time-span as the locus of my life: I become identified with that era; it is, in one sense, a quantum which I own. The future is always the region of possibility; but now that a boundary is drawn at its outer limit, it has the added character of “opportunity,” an opportunity which is single and unique. Of this self, there will be no more and no other than what this finite time shall

in fact contain. Now for the first time I truly *enter into time*; and this sober arrival, the true date of my human maturity, is a stage of being which, once experienced, I could not willingly forgo.

For human maturity, bringing with it the pervasive reconstruction of all purposes, by the recognition of *limit*, is a notable advance in self-knowledge. Still, such acceptance of death is hardly the same as a reconciliation with death. One continues to think and hope impossible things about prolonging life, or of transposing its unfinished activities to another sphere. But in due time one perceives another aspect of the situation—namely, that living tends to produce the mental conditions for its own closing.

We hear of the biological life-cycle, the maturing and the running-down of the body, the accompanying loss of mental savor and enterprise. We take it for granted that in this decline it is the physical failure which slowly inflicts itself upon the mind, so that death actually begins long before it is consummated, solely because the body has passed its zenith. Why does it not occur to us that

there is also a mental life-cycle whereby, even without the aid of the body, a welcome is prepared for death?

Consider this: that living, for a human being, is a series of decisions; and that each decision has the effect of rendering actual what was previously a mere possibility, one among many. Before I decide, my field of possibility has a certain generality and freedom; when I have acted, one possibility is, as we say, "realized," the others are abandoned and thus in effect destroyed. And this one which is realized is pinned down, dated, and entangled with all the circumstances of its particular time and place. So long as I merely wish to eat, I remain free as to what I eat and where; but if I am to continue in existence I must abandon this freedom and come to the actual decision to eat: I must settle on a place and an hour and commit myself to the food then and there available and all its associations. My best foresight is incomplete, so that in choosing I perforce accept much that I have not chosen. In brief, decision must traffic with the facts at hand, and in so doing take *their* color, *their* manner, *their* moment: decision descends into a world of

irrelevant particulars, is compromised with a measure of irrationality, and without this cannot touch the ground of concrete existence.

There are persons who keenly feel and resent this stain involved in decision, this acceptance of arbitrary datedness in one's purpose, this descent into irrationality. They are pained by the necessity of decision, scrutinize all their attachments, defer commitment, remain aloof from party-belonging, from institutions, even from friendships, since "friends must descend to meet." But to remain aloof is to die before one begins to live. There is no choice but to immerse oneself in the stream of history, accept one's time-location, breathe-in the contaminations of tradition, become defined as the man of this issue, this party, this emergency.

The mind is at home with its ideas, especially with the ideal possibilities it has built out of the material of imagination; as imaginative, they are "figments"; but as containing the ingredients of value, they claim loyalty as well as desire. But living is a continuous marriage of idea with fact, and like every bridal, on one hand it fulfills one's destiny



and on the other limits one's infinitude. Hence it is that mingling with all one's attachments there arises a factor of detachment, a growing tide of criticism of those accidental and irrelevant traits which, accepted with each decision, accumulate as a sediment in self-consciousness. And with this, as the passage of time renders it sensible of its own purport, there arises an impulse to revert to the original wholeness and freedom. One stands less and less under the spell of the excited emphases, the eloquent self-proclaimed importances of the current world, or one adopts the illusion of momentousness in the passing show with a touch of will, as an habitu   of the drama. New enterprises attract but fall short of conviction; familiar sayings stir familiar feelings but without dominating the will; a broadening sympathy dilutes the energies of efficiency: the scale of one's values takes its proportion increasingly from moods of serenity, less and less from the enthusiasms and pugnacities of the arena. And death thereby acquires yet a new meaning.

For death begins to mean freedom from the acquired load and burden of the irrational. *This* self, scarred, marked, identified, dated,

need not live forever. Coming as a release and as forgiveness for the untruth of the pragmatic personality, death appears with a fitness, a necessity, even a beauty of its own. In this way, living generates in the mind, as well as in the body, a certain willingness to die.

In point of fact, these tempers characteristic of natural age are to some extent always present. For the capacity to regard my particular life as a special object of thought, and so as something separate from the self that judges it—something to be prized but also estimated, criticised and for due cause renounced—this is the special mark of humanity.

I am not altogether free in any action (young or old) so long as I am dominated by an inescapable will to live. Under the spell of that instinct, life appears precious above all things, and no good however great could justify its sacrifice: for when consciousness is gone, there is nothing. As I think of it, I become obsessed by the necessity of living, which means holding to the life I have with a desperate tenacity: and the ordinary risks

which men take gladly—the risks of soldier, miner, aviator, traveler, nay, of the common deeds of eating, conversing, losing one's guard in sleep, become forms of madness.

As contrasted with such rational—and craven—fascination with living, the willingness to die appears as a necessary condition of normal life, and a well-considered acceptance of death as a new stage of freedom. The power of suicide—whether the act itself be base or noble, whether it be direct, or the indirect suicide of a Socrates or a Jesus, of men who live too dangerously for natural death—is an exalted power. Property is not mine until I can alienate it: life is not mine until I can renounce it.

This type of freedom is peculiarly marked in our own day; and though it disguises itself under the mask of an ironic humor which refuses to take too seriously the only thing of serious import to oneself, it is one sign of the inner greatness of this age. It has been a condition without which the best advances of our science, medicine, technology could hardly have occurred. Tagore, in rebuking the notion that the civilization of the West is “materialistic” as compared with the “spirit-

ual" quality of the Orient, has well recorded this quality underlying our technological advance:

When the aeroplane rises into the sky, we may marvel at it as the acme of mechanical perfection. But it is more than this: it is a victory of the spirit. For it was not until, in the West, man had overcome the fear of death that he could master the art of flying,—the art of the gods!

Through death, then, life becomes a surveyable object, distinct from myself, which I can on occasion and with good will put away. And this may be the beginning of seeing beyond death. But whether this is truth or fancy cannot be judged until we attend to the logical analysis which underlies our ideas of life and death.

### III

## LOGICAL PRELIMINARIES

### UNNECESSARY IMPEDIMENTS

THERE is an aroma of triviality attending most argument about immortality. One seems to be considering a competition between a disruptive force, death, and a cohesive force, personal consciousness, somewhat on the analogy of the competition between the penetrative power of projectiles and the resistance of armor plate, as if a victory in favor of survival could be scored by showing that the soul has a certain tensile strength. Or as if it were a question of the articles of association between mind and body, whether a partnership or an identity. If the two are identical, the death of the body is the death of the mind; if the two are simply associates, then death may mean the dissolution of a partnership, in which the mind is set free from an intimate bond, and may conceivably move on alone, or spin another relationship.

Instinctive distaste for such argumentation

is a symptom that the grounds of decision on this issue are not to be found in the play of concepts, but belong rather to that region in which the felt values of things legislate for our sense of truth. Nevertheless, we are not justified in the evasion of logical issues; for it is the particular function of logic to bring consistency into our views, trivial or important, and to clear away unnecessary confusions. It is seldom that the careful definition of a problem fails to bring to light something of its answer.

There is a brand of logic which would exclude in advance all occupation with this problem on the ground that it is speculative and therefore meaningless. This critique, promising a vast economy of thought, is in accord with the positivist temper which professes to extract all its meanings from hard facts, the modern method of milking stones. But the logic of the positivist here falls into fallacy. For, as we pointed out at the beginning, the problem of survival is not speculative in its immediate nature: it is a question of empirical fact; it is concerned with events in time. A "survival" which should imply a

passage out of time into timelessness would indeed be devoid of meaning; but this is not what is meant by survival. In the case of my own survival, it is a question of future fact. In the case of the survival of persons already dead, it is a question of present fact: Are they or any of them now living and aware of anything?

To say that it is an empirical question is to say that its answer may be verified in experience. But this is the peculiarity of the question: that it can not be verified by us, but only by the survivors. Apart from the conjectural yields of psychical research or of parapsychology, on which I can here place no weight, there is for us no empirical evidence to be had. Death, we assume, is in any case the cessation of communication; the social basis on which scientific experience commonly expands is thus closed to us.

It is for this reason that we are driven to approach the problem indirectly, through speculative channels. But the absence of direct verifiability no more justifies us in banishing the question than the absence of intercourse between Peru and Spain in 1400 A.D. could

have justified a denial by either of the existence of the other.

The problem of immortality, then, is a non-speculative question which depends for its answer on speculative questions; and these speculative questions, because something particular depends on them, are saved from being meaningless, by the most positive of positivistic criteria.

It is this necessary reference to the wider world-view which takes the problem out of the region of probability or improbability, where for most contemporary appraisal it seems to lie. It is, for example, a common judgment that in view of the close association of mind and brain, survival is improbable. This is to speak loosely. If there is a strict co-variation between brain action and mental action, survival is not improbable but impossible. The element of doubt attaches not to the inference but to the reasoning which sets up the premiss, the alleged co-variation. If that premiss is in error, the exclusion of survival fails, and fails not by gradual steps, but completely. There are no intermediate degrees of probability.

This illustrates our thesis that survival is



neither probable nor improbable, in advance of a determination of one's worldview or metaphysics. For metaphysics undertakes to determine what sorts of order and disorder exist in the world; and it is on the ground of these types of order that probability of any sort has to be judged. A given type of order may exclude survival; another type of order may require it; a third type of order may show survival to be possible under certain conditions. In no case are we dealing with probabilities.

This analysis might lead us to expect that something like a proof might be forthcoming, either that survival takes place, or that it is impossible. And some men do in fact attain conviction, by way of their general view of the world. If they believe that the universe has a unity and a dominating purpose, or makes on the whole some sort of sense, they are prone to conclude that the minds of men must be able somehow to carry on their adventure. If they adopt the view that human life and consciousness are episodes in a world which as a whole has no purposive structure, but is in its last analysis plain physical fact,

they are bound to consider survival both meaningless and impossible.

But as a matter of human history, those who affirm immortality have usually been more hopeful than certain, whereas those who deny it have commonly regarded their position as having the force of a demonstration. I am personally little impressed by the proofs which have been offered for the immortality of the soul. That the soul is intrinsically indestructible, because of its absolute simplicity or its character as a substance, I do not believe. The distinction above referred to, between an identity of mind and body and an association of mind with body, seems to me of logical value, but of no great force in this problem; for the alliance of mind and body is in any case so close that we cannot regard either as a complete entity without the other, nor acquit the mind of responsibility for what its body does.

Nor am I convinced by the usual idealistic arguments, derived from the prior reality of the subject self with reference to its objects. It is true that the human knower collaborates in building up its world of objects, for knowing is interpreting, and interpreting is act-

ing. But the human self is not the sole author of its objects, nor does it construct at its own free choice: its production must be a reproduction or it is false. The ego is thus dependent on outer reality, even while it acts; and if it were severed from the original sources of its own object-world, the remaining self would hardly be a complete person, nor capable of life.

I find more satisfaction in an involuntary argument which might be drawn from a diametrically opposite world-view, whether in the form of materialism, or naturalism, or realism, or technical behaviorism. This type of view, which approaches all understanding of mental facts from the side of the nervous system, and excludes on principle every appeal to consciousness as a factor in the activity of the organism, has to regard the mind as a fact for which it has no use, and for which therefore it can offer no explanation. For the behaviorist the operating organism would be a much neater affair, and would act just the same, if it were not conscious. He cannot, of course, deny the existence of the fact of consciousness, at least in his own person; and he

assumes that the human bodies around him are attended by this same useless phenomenon. He therefore talks with us, his fellow-men, and feels sorry for us when we seem to be ailing. But the presence of consciousness in the world puzzles him. It ought not to be there, on his premisses. And the inference he ought to draw from this anomaly, I should judge, is that consciousness is an independent fact which observes its own laws and goes its own way in the universe. The more perfect the behaviorist's theory, the more completely is he obliged to resign any effort to include this strange and superfluous fact in the system of what he calls "nature"; and he must refer all questions as to its origin and destiny to its own intrinsic laws. It becomes for him strictly supernatural. The death of the brain would have, on this showing, no bearing whatever on the future destiny of what we call the self.

But this comment is, of course, purely negative in its value. It aids simply to relieve our minds with regard to the confident foreclosure of the question by those illogical logicians who are most emphatic in foreclosing it. We

proceed to consider other logical obstacles to a clear judgment of the problem.

Aside from the materialistic inference, which escapes its channel, the chief metaphysical premiss from which a no-survival conclusion is drawn is *our habitual monism*: the world is one—there is no “other world.” If there is no other world, there is no locus for departed spirits, since they obviously have no place in this world (unless through some metempsychosis, which we also omit from the argument). Objections to other-worldliness are moral as well as structural; the social ethic and the humanistic religion of our day alike insist that the salvation of the soul and of the world shall take place in the present scene of things, and form a part of the business of human history. This point will concern us later. For the present we are interested only in the concept of “otherness.”

The imaginations of those who first conceived survival had no difficulty with the location of the other life or lives. It was in some far away place, some Heaven above the stars, some Western Paradise, some realm of Osiris or of Hades underneath the earth. Transit to

these places implied a journey of the soul, a perilous passage, with strange mental transformations to be sure, but nevertheless a *motion*, like that of a physical body: and motion can never get beyond the given universe of space and time—the other life was still in some part of this universe. With growing astronomical sophistication, the pious let their minds dwell on the possibilities of other planets for the habitations of the soul. The modes of conveyance thither might be magical, but the regions were well within “Nature.”

None of these conceptions is any longer possible. If there is another life, there must be another Nature. And if there is but one space-time order, there can be but one Nature: for Nature is defined as the system of all events in the space-time universe. The word “other” is treacherous. It is properly applicable to anything which is partial: for any object with a boundary, there may be another such. But when applied to the unbounded whole of things, the word “other” loses its meaning: we seem to ourselves to mean something by the phrase “other world” only by illicitly drawing an imaginary bound-

ary about this world. So runs the thought of the monist.

This thought is bound up with a certain conception of space. According to this conception, the space we inhabit is complete after its own kind, and being complete must be unique: for since it occupies (or rather, is) all the room there is, there is no "outside" in which another space could deploy its elements. To put the matter technically, we may think of the "whole of space" as the totality of positions which would be swept by an expanding sphere centered at a given point and moving outward without limit. It may also be defined as the totality of positions which could be reached from a given point by continuous motion, or which are related to a given point by distance and direction. But if one point, A, can be reached from another point, B, then B can be reached from A: hence every point in space will serve as well as any other as a center—each will define the same totality. If we were to try to define two different spaces by starting from remote points, we should only define the same space.

By this same reasoning, if we were to at-

tempt to define two or more coexisting "spaces," they would have to be so related as to have *no point in common*. Nor could one be outside the other; for "outsideness" is a spatial relationship, i.e., a relation between two fragments of the same space which have no points in common. If, then, there is to be an "other" space, it is necessary (and also sufficient) to define a point which is not related to any point in the given space by distance and direction. It is natural to assume that no such point can be defined, and hence that there is no other space.

This was Kant's point of view. He was deeply impressed with the notion of an object whose character was such that there could be but one instance of it, and that instance complete and infinite. His wonder was justified. It is true that modern mathematics is accustomed to speak of spaces in the plural. It speaks of spaces of different type, Euclidean and non-Euclidean; it speaks also of plural instances of space of the same type. Each such space is complete; yet no one of them need have a point in common with any other. This freedom in setting up spaces is derived from the play of imagination in setting up



alternative sets of postulates from which various algebras of geometry may be drawn. Modern mathematics makes no assumption that there is more than one actual or real space: its plural spaces are imaginary.

Nevertheless, it is important for our purposes that the imagination can deal with plural spaces. We are concerned solely with the possible meaning of a relation, that of "otherness" as applied to space. If mathematics can make a significant transition from one space to another, that transition may afford the relation we seek.

For the mathematician, the transition is obviously a mental one. Each of his spaces is set up by an act of thought. The passage from one to another is a shift of attention. Thus points in one of his spaces if they are related at all to points in another, are certainly not spatially related: they are related solely by way of this common mental origin. There is no more meaning in asking how far a point in one space is from a point in another, than in asking how far the stream in the picture is from the floor of the room in which the picture is hung. The two problems are precisely similar; for art has been long in advance of

mathematics in devising a plurality of spaces as the regions for a plurality of worlds which neither interpenetrate nor interfere, though each is infinite and complete. The catastrophes of the drama have no tendency to shake the house in which the drama is shown: the transitions from world to world are mental, not spatial nor causal.

And dream, in turn, has been in advance of art. For in dream, the space-time world in which events take place need have no point in common with the space-time world of waking life. The structure of the dream-world presents this interesting difference from that of the work of art: that in art, the self as observer or maker remains outside of the thing made and conscious of its otherness from the "real" world, whereas in dream the self is an actor to whom the waking world is for the moment non-existent (except in the rare occasions in which one knows that one is dreaming) and the transition to and from dream is involuntary. The catastrophes of the dream-world fortunately leave the real world unshaken; though the reverse is not the case, the "otherness" is not complete. But the structural relations, the intra-mental transition

ties which may enable us, as they enabled primitive men, to use the notion of an "other" world without confusion.

So far, we pursue the purely logical aspect of the notion of another life in another world. It is not the province of logic to deal with the concrete aspects of any problem: these lie before us. While we thus recur to the comment that such arguments as these leave on the mind an unbanishable sense of triviality, since the issues of life and death are not here, we may fairly remind ourselves that the issues of life are issues of thought, and that thought is often halted by unnecessary obstacles—not less in our day than in earlier days, but, I fancy, more so, since we live more consciously by thought and less by instinct. And while many of these issues are trivial, we may remember with humility that they are not the difficulties of the simple but of instructed and ingenious minds. It is for the sake of the intelligent that we must be momentarily logicians.

#### THE MIND AND ITS BODY

There is one further preliminary issue, not purely logical but turning on a point of logic, which has such wide influence and is

so involved in natural sophistry that we may give it separate treatment. It is the question of the relation of mind and body. Common judgment on the question of survival is, I think, more governed by this than by any other observation, that "mind and body vary together," an observation which every extension of knowledge confirms and makes more precise.

I use a certain latitude in calling this thesis an observation, for we never perceive the two in process of varying together. In the sense in which we perceive the body, we do not perceive the mind at all: mental changes in other people we infer from bodily changes—the co-variation is not so much a result as an assumption. But having assumed it, in momentary transactions, the idea confirms itself in the large, and we accept the broad agreement of physical life-cycle with mental life-cycle as a theorem so stable that to question it discounts the judgment of the questioner. And on the basis of this theorem, death is death, as final for mind as for brain.

On this point we are all scientists, and would have little interest in an ancient issue between the scientific and the poetic type of

mind, if it were not for the genius of an ancient poet which may still have its logical instruction. For Plato, the soul could have but one body at a time, but in different lives might be tenant of a series of different bodies. Aristotle, the scientist, was rightly disturbed by the nonchalance with which Plato allowed the soul not only to change bodies, but even to become released from any body and to wander through the nether regions bodiless and glad, as if freed from an encumbrance and also from an enemy of clear thought and good morals. Against such irresponsible imagining, Aristotle brought forward the impressive thesis that the distinction between soul and body is an abstraction: they are working parts of the same being; the soul is nothing but the living principle of the given body, and therefore inconceivable apart from it.

Aristotle differed from the modern physiologist in holding that the converse is also true; the body is inconceivable apart from its mind. When we think of an organic body by itself we have to ascribe to it a "capacity for life": the *psyche* is simply the "entelechy" or realization of that capacity. Without it the body does not operate, does not live, and is

therefore not truly a body. And the soul, in turn, is as unintelligible apart from a specific body whose life it is, as breathing is unintelligible apart from a specific lung, or vision apart from a specific eye.

On this view, the body is not the residence of a separable tenant, still less a prison-house or hindrance to moral aspiration: it is that which alone gives the soul a reason for being, a footing in the universe. And each particular soul is the completion of a particular body, and could fit no other. That the soul of a man should appear in the body of a fox or a lion is only a shade more absurd than that the soul of Caesar should appear in the body of Mussolini. Aristotle would have relished the problem of a seventeenth century Harvard thesis: Whether the speech of Baalam's ass involved a temporary alteration of the animal's vocal chords.

On this issue, modern thought has gone wholly Aristotelian. In doing so it has turned up a puzzle from which Aristotle was free. For Aristotle who was happily ignorant of the precise functions of the brain—thinking of it as a sort of cooling device for the superheated humors of the body—avoided the em-

barrassment of having two agencies controlling the same events. We happen to know what the brain is for, at least in part, namely, the higher co-ordination of behavior. But if we know what our minds are for, they also appear to be engaged in the higher co-ordination of behavior. We thus have two entities doing the same thing: *what my brain does, I do!* We seem to have a duplicate and equivalent control. This anomalous situation we seek to escape either by identifying the two entities—the brain *is* the mind—or by denying that the control apparently exercised by the mind is real. Aristotle would have been obliged to reject both alternatives, for there were two matters on which he was completely certain: (1) that the brain is not the mind, and (2) that the mind is the real activity-pattern of the body. But these convictions imply that Aristotle, with all his vast common sense, and his remarkable insight into the functional union of soul and body, has no solution for the modern problem; for this problem is made by what we know of the brain. On the other hand, the modern scientist has no solution which will provide for those two things that Aristotle knew. This is

the impasse which the problem has come to in our time, leading many thinkers to attempt an escape from the problem by re-defining mind and body.

It is here that we have to make our logical observation. Little as we actually know of the physiological basis of mental life, there is no good reason for doubting any of the surmises that lead to the quandary of "duplicate control." Whatever I seem to myself to do, when I direct my body to do this and that—all of this can be theoretically referred to brain-events without remainder. We need not, however, assume that these two controls are identical: we may say either that these brain-events are the faithful and complete *image* of my mental-events, or that my mental-events are the faithful and complete *image* of the brain-events. Either way of putting it satisfies the Aristotelian doctrine of the exact and unique fitness between a given mind and a given body. But the first way of putting it—that the brain-events, without being identical with the mental events, are an exact image of them in another medium—frees us from the inference that to one mind there is one and



only one body, and admits us (with prudent reserves) into the cosmos of Plato.

For note that the condition required by the postulates of physiological psychology—that the brain events shall perfectly correspond, one-to-one, with events passing in the mind—can be met *by a whole class of bodies*—not by one body alone. Consider a face mirrored in a series of mirrors: each is the precise reflection of this face and no other, yet each reflection is numerically distinct from every other. Imagine these mirrors slightly curved, and each curved with a slight difference from every other: we shall then have a series of reflections, each slightly and differently distorted—qualitatively as well as numerically different, yet each one recognizable as the image of this face and no other. Or let your hand cast a series of shadows, as the light takes different positions; each shadow differs from every other, and yet each shadow is the shadow of your hand, and could be the shadow of no other hand and of no other object under heaven.

The mathematician has no difficulty in expressing the principle of this remark. B, the brain-event, corresponds precisely with C,

the conscious-event; that is, B is a function of C. But B is also a function of something else, let us say, the environment, E. Then for any one value of C, there will be as many possible values of B as there are possible values of E. Without violating the Aristotelian principle of exact correspondence, but because of it, the same mind, C, in a different environment, E', would necessarily have a different brain-event, B', and so, in sum, a different body. Thus to a given mind there would correspond a *class* of possible bodies, and not one only. This class might possibly be infinite.

We may recur at this point to our illustration of the dream—from which the superstitious mind of the race has taken too much of the content of its metaphysics, while the unsuperstitious, repelled by this abuse, have almost wholly neglected its instructive logical structure. The dreaming person has a dream-world, but also a dream-body: his awareness of this body is usually much more obscure than his awareness of the environing objects, but he is frequently conscious of bodily effort, and of power or lack of power to act in definite ways, some of which (as flying) are

characteristically different from those of the waking state. This dream-body is thus "another" body than the waking body, somewhat in the sense imagined by Plato, while yet conforming strictly to the principle of unique fitness to the individual mind insisted upon by Aristotle.

Our divergence from Aristotle lies in this point: that he seems to have considered the body as the primary reality in point of genesis, out of which the *psyche* emerges as the perfecting function, somewhat as reason supervenes in the developing human being; whereas in the view here stated the *psyche* is the original reality, and the body-and-brain system is its derivative or representation within the natural context. But for Aristotle also, the *psyche* is said to be the substance of the man, and the perfection of a thing its true "nature"; hence the apparent divergence may be merely a symptom of the fact that for Aristotle many of our problems of mind and body had not attained the sharpness which they have had in modern times, especially since the work of the great Distinguisher, Descartes.

So far for our logical preliminaries, which

have aimed solely to release from prevailing fog certain conceptions without which the idea of survival cannot so much as be defined. We now turn to consider certain broad characters of the structure of experience which bear concretely on the problem.

## IV

### A DILEMMA OF WORLD STRUCTURE

WE CANNOT today begin an enquiry into the general structure of the cosmos with the words "mind" and "body," or, "subject" and "object," or, "the self" and "the physical world," as pairs of terms already well understood, of which we have only to discover the true relationship. For common usage we understand these terms well enough; for meeting a persistent puzzle, we have reason to suspect them of concealing an ancient trap. We must try to define them; the effort to do so drives us to new starting points—more elementary notions in terms of which these conceptions can be built up.

For example, the physical object, the "thing," is the commonest coin of the world's thinking and of its vocabularies. It is an object which everybody can observe and which is not altered—perceptibly—by the operation of looking at it, nor by the light that falls on it. Nevertheless, in all strictness, we are not

seeing the object, but the object-modified-by-light-and-by-our-proximity-and-by-our-instrument-of-vision. What we actually have is a perception into whose make-up numerous factors have entered, and from it we have "constructed" that object which seems to stand before us in its own character. We need a less committed starting point.

It is natural that such a starting point should be sought in "immediate experience"; for where else than in experience can we find the raw stuff of meanings which are simple and inescapable? Interpretations of experience I may doubt: I cannot doubt the fact that I have it, and that such and such contents are present. Thus physics today, troubled by inconsistencies among its hypotheses, is more willing than usual to give a hearing to "sense data" as possible sources for its logical simples.

This starting point is especially convenient for describing phenomena which are relative to the observer and his instruments; and there are physicists who, regarding all phenomena as thus relative, are prone to identify the scope of the world with the scope of experience. But "experience" (in spite of all effort to keep it neutral as between the mind which

experiences and the objects which it experiences) remains tarred with a subjective and private quality. From such a starting point one has to labor to construct those simple notions with which physical science habitually begins, such as "the physical object," "other minds," "verifiability." For this reason many physicists prefer the risks of beginning with the physical object as a simple idea, and introducing corrections for the relativities of observation and instrument.

We have then at least two different scientific languages constructed on two diverse sets of primitive ideas. If these languages were perfect instruments of enquiry they should be precisely equivalent: we should have the same description of the world in each case though in other words. In practice this exact equivalence is not the case. And the differences become critical at a point which concerns our present enquiry—the place of the mind or the self in nature.

According to the language which begins with the physical object—the language of "physicalism"—everything can be readily provided for except the mind. The presence or absence of consciousness in connection with

an animal organism cannot be verified, and the theoretical picture would be cleaner if it were omitted. The human organism is a part of the natural world. It arises out of nature; while it lives, the lines of causation from all surrounding nature run through it; it goes back to nature. The mind which accompanies it will follow the same course: for it also, the world which surrounds the organism surrounds it; this world existed before its advent and will continue after its disappearance. From this point of view, *the self is within the world*.

According to the other language—that which begins with sense-data, the subjective language—everything can be readily provided for except a real physical world. This language has no use for the concepts of substance or causality: it is not concerned with the ultimate nature of matter or energy. *Its* theoretical picture is cleaner if *these* are omitted. The world of nature is a mental construct falling within the whole of “experience.” My direct sense-data, to be sure, touch but a small part of this physical world: but it is my thought which spins out, from these occasional and almost accidental materials of sense-percep-



tion, a continuous world; and it is my hypotheses which make its changes intelligible and consistent. Its fabric is thus through and through mental: and for this language, accordingly, *the world is within the self*.

Between these two views, arising from different languages, logic has no criterion for choosing. And physical science (not being concerned with the destiny of the conscious self) has no preference between them, so long as its own accepted range of phenomena are equally well provided for. The physical language remains for it the more usual. But it can accustom itself also to the subjective language which, after all, only reverts to a remark of Aristotle to the effect that "*the psyche* is, in a sense, everything that exists. For whatever exists is an object either of sensation or of thought; and objects of sensation and thought are, in a way, identical with the sensation and thought themselves."<sup>1</sup> At this point Aristotle trembles on the verge of saying that the world is, "in a sense," within the *psyche*!

But while logic cannot choose between the languages, and science declines to choose ex-

<sup>1</sup> De Anima III, c. viii. Wheelwright's translation.

cept on grounds of convenience, the common man can hardly retain such a perfect poise. He understands what is meant by a purely linguistic difference; and yet he has a suspicion that between a language for which the self is in the world and a language for which the world is in the self there may be conveyed—by a metaphysical innuendo of which the logician is not wholly guiltless—material differences which concern his own fate. This suspicion is confirmed if he follows these two positions to some of their corollaries:

If, as the language of physicalism has it, the self is within the world, then the self is finite in space and time, and there may be many such selves in the world wholly separate from and “outside of” one another. If the world is within the self, then it would appear to follow that the world is finite—not in space and time, but as an aspect of experience; and the corresponding conclusion would follow that there may be for the self many such worlds—a somewhat startling conclusion, for which our logical preliminaries have prepared us.

If the self is within the world, the death of the self is also an event within the one world, and as much a mark of the temporal finitude of the self as its birth: there is nothing of the self beyond that boundary. If the world is within the self, death as an event within the world has no necessary value as a time-boundary of the self.

In view of these divergent corollaries, the common man is inclined to reject the invitation to regard these differences as purely linguistic, and to take it that he ought to choose between the proposed modes of expression as if they were differences of metaphysic. They remind him of an antithesis in the history of philosophy: that between idealism and realism, in which until recently, men were called upon to take sides. To the idealist, the typical item of reality was just this element of "experience" which Descartes called a thought, Locke an idea, Hume an impression, the logical analyst a sense-datum. To the realist, the typical item of reality was just this element of nature which we call a physical thing. The logician of today protests that he is deliberately refusing to talk about "realities," doubting whether that word has any

assignable meaning. The plain man remembers that the word "reality" had just those functional meanings with which he is now concerned—the "real" was understood to be that which endures, that which corrects errors, that which explains appearances: and under whatever name, it seems to him a highly concrete issue whether one ascribes these properties to the sort of thing we call a thought or to the sort of thing we call a quantum of energy.

And since neither the logician nor the scientist is willing to deal with this question, and he is obliged to deal with it himself, it occurs to the plain man to ask whether this indifference of the technicians, expressed in the form, "Either language is admissible," may be translated for his own concreter interests into the form, "*Both views of reality are true.*"

For, he reflects, there is a sense in which the brick or the atom or the ultimate physical unit is the standard of reality. When he considers his own consciousness in its variable, flickering, vulnerable character, he would aspire to be as real as a stone post or as a law of nature. Since he comes out of that natural

world, he must draw his reality from it; and aware of continuous dependence upon it, he is impelled to say "I am only as real as my world."

But there is also a sense in which his thoughts and feelings are the standard of reality. Since Descartes, no one can put thought out of the list of real entities. When we speak of the "reality of a thing," we are aiming at its "true inwardness," the way it feels to itself: and if, as an inanimate thing it has no way of feeling to itself, we rightly judge it a relatively empty sort of being. Nothing of this empty sort, though it be the stone post itself, can be as real as an experience of joy or suffering. If in a storm at sea one considers which is more real, the tempest or the agonized heaving of men at the pumps, one may very well yield the physical issue to the winds, and still judge that the intensities of feeling within those laboring human frames are the realest entities in the situation. Seeing this, one grasps the other standard: "My world, at best, can be only as real as I am." It derives its accent of actuality from the circumstance that I am conscious of it.

Thus in the ordinary acknowledgments of

thought, the standard of reality passes from object to subject and back again; neither of these modes of judgment is to be rejected; the standard must somehow be twofold and the truly concrete and durable being, the "real," must include both.

But how is this to be understood? The plain man gains some light when he tries to carry through the subjective view of things, according to which the world is within the self. What does this world, which is alleged to be within me, itself contain? Among other things, it contains organisms and their careers, and the selves connected with them, just as the opposing view of physicalism would have it. With the other selves, it includes also *my* self! Then the self, in containing nature, contains the self—in another aspect. Then, becoming suddenly self-conscious, he exclaims, "That is the plain fact of the case! I, the observer, in surveying my world am also looking on at myself as an observed fact within my world. The effort to know the world of objects brings me to a new mode of self-consciousness, a knowledge of myself which I might not otherwise attain. The dilemma I have been struggling with is now traced to a

doubleness in the meaning of my 'self': in whatever sense I contain my world, in that sense I also contain myself. It is I who am a two-fold being, and yet in both aspects the same self."

In this way the plain man has lighted upon a principle which, if we are right, will have far-reaching consequences for his views of life and death, as well as of other matters. We shall call it the *principle of "empirical duality"*—a phrase shortly to be explained. It is not the simple and ancient paradox of the static self-consciousness, but an experience which develops out of self-consciousness and presents the self in a two-fold relationship to other beings. The plain man is relieved by this insight from the sense of contradiction which has been dogging him; but the logical difficulty is not abolished—it is transferred to the complexity of his own nature, whither we shall now attempt to follow it.

## V

### THE PRINCIPLE OF DUALITY

#### THE SELF AND THE SUBCONSCIOUS

ONE who is seeking light on the nature of the self might naturally turn for help to the science of psychology. What account does it give of these two aspects of the self? It is disconcerting to learn that contemporary psychology is in doubt whether it can do anything with even one aspect of the self, not to mention two.

There is good reason for this doubt. For psychology, as a science, has to occupy itself with objects which can be identified, such as sensations, thoughts, feelings or their physical expressions. Such objects might be designated as states or contents of a self; but this reference to a self would hardly aid in identifying them unless the self could serve as an identifiable object. But the self is not one of these contents: there is no sensation of the self. The phrase "a visual sensation" may be



equivalent to the phrase "I see"; but this "I" is a constant factor in all such experiences, and is therefore of no distinctive use in the theory of vision. It can be understood as present without being continually repeated. To say that several states belong to the same self is another way of saying that they occur *together*; for how could they occur together except in the same mind? Hence empirical psychology tends to dispose of the self in the simple assumption that certain mental states are together with others.

Some psychologists recognize that this is not wholly adequate to the facts; for the self appears to be active; it is not merely a place of assemblage for its several "contents." What does it do? It makes a difference in the way these contents cohere, get associated, attended to, emphasized or forgotten. It is like an invisible wind which selects, retains, discards; or like a magnetic field—also invisible—which shows its effect in the way a scattering of iron filings arrange themselves. But these activities—if they are such—may again be disposed of by descriptive psychology as contents, so to speak, of the second order, under such names as "attention," "disposition," "ac-

tive set." They call for no reference to an imperceptible agent, the self; for what the science is concerned with is the events, not the agent; the changes, not the hypothetical and constant source of change.

In these ways, for empirical psychology, the self within the world tends to lose that significant unity which it has for the plain man instituting the enquiry. And as for that other aspect of the self whose language takes the form, "The world is within the self," this self is nowhere recognized. It resembles too much, perhaps, that grammatical subject, that "I" of the phrase, "I think," which Kant called the transcendental unity of apperception, and which (he averred) could by its very definition as subject never be an empirical object. We cannot ask a psychology, bent on achieving status as a natural science, to deal with any self (if it does so much) except the self which is an object within nature.

But it is just at this point that the plain man is likely to insist that the inclusive self he is talking about *is empirical*, though to perceive it may require a shift in the angle of vision. And in support of this view we may now put forward a thesis, namely, that there

are empirical elements of self-consciousness, and that the omission of them has revenged itself in one of the maladroit chapters of modern psychology, the confused and fumbling theory of the *subconscious*. For, in my judgment, the various alleged contents and functions of the subconscious are for the most part fragments of this inclusive self.

If we ask what the subconscious is supposed to contain we find it presented to us as a sort of cellar to which miscellaneous rejected states of mind are relegated. It is the residence of uneasy ghosts of repressed memories; also of furtive primitive impulses arising from animal heredity and vainly striving for the recognition of overt consciousness.

A very different group of contents is the mass of traces of past experience, forgotten or remembered and not being referred to, the body of "memory" and of the undistinguished experiences from which one has learned, such as that dim recollection of once-burned fingers which has long continued to modify subsequent impulses to grasp flames. Of this forever accumulating multitude of shades for which we may still conveniently use the term

“apperceptive mass,” we may say that we are not thinking *of* it chiefly because we are always thinking *with* it. Every incident of our lives passes into it; and whether or not we ever single out a given incident for individual recall—though we never again think of it—we shall continue to think *with* it until we die. Its presence in memory, or in subconsciousness, is anything but a condition of inactive storage; it is an active functioning in receiving, recognizing, evaluating every new experience.

When one says that “I” have met a new experience, it is evident that this “I” is a variable; for such experience is met well or ill, adequately or inadequately, somewhat in proportion to the equipment afforded by this ordered magazine of past experience: We begin thus to note the identity of the “self” and the “subconscious.” And the same identity will appear as we consider two further groups of contents commonly assigned to the subconscious, the repressions and the possibilities.

Psychiatrists have accustomed us to the notion of a rill of unfavorable comment upon experience, persons, our own budding impulses—comment which while repressed is not

annihilated but is said to persist in subconsciousness where it may work mischief, build up "complexes," incite obscure mental disorders. There is an abundance of clinical material which this scheme more or less fairly interprets; but there are certain obvious follies in the stage setting. For since repression is a conscious event and cannot be performed nor continued except by an awareness of what is being repressed: since it is "I" who act as censor, it is "I" who also entertain the rebellious comment; it is "I" whose wishes are always partly unfulfilled, and who persist in the hope that some day in some guise they may receive expression. An unconscious impulse is no impulse at all; a subconscious impulse, at least half-lighted by conscious attention, is *my* impulse, though I may hold it in leash until it can go with my full sanction.

Unsatisfied wishes (including our much-curbed pugnacities, impulses to criticize, condemn, denounce, fight, kill, destroy, held in check until we know what we want to do) merge with another group of subconscious contents not less important, but less noted—our undefined possibilities, sometimes referred to as our "powers." If one is asked

point blank what his powers are, an instant introspection affords him little light. An adolescent boy has powers; he is aware of them as an *ensemble* in the sense that they contribute to his self-assurance; yet he would be at a loss to define them. He seldom thinks of them; he habitually thinks *with* them. He can hardly be aware of them as outlined facts because, for one reason, he has not learned their limits. Maturity brings much knowledge of the limits of specific powers—one's speed, capacity for figures, chess, music, professional prowess—but there remains an integral sense of power, inseparable from self-consciousness, to which no limit is ever drawn.

This unawareness of limit is sometimes referred to as the "infinitude" of the self. It is truer, I think, to regard it not as a positive or actual infinitude but as a *negative wholeness*, an absence of boundary, inhibition, division in regard to oneself. With the absence of boundary there goes the absence of explicit consciousness—the quality is subconscious, closely identified with self: we live in it as if we had a command of its whole nature. As in the familiar instance of space,

whatever fragment we have rounds itself into an integral whole. Or, more concretely, in the case of vision: I do not see the effect of the blindspot in my eye as a blank in the field of vision, nor do I remark the line limiting that field. I do not positively assert the infinitude of the field, but the absence of definite limit allows it to assume a certain integrity and totality. So with our knowledge. Few human beings are inclined to assert omniscience; yet few confront the world originally as if there were anything there they could not understand. Skepticism is a late acquisition of the race. It is Hobbes who adduces as evidence for the equality of mankind in respect to mentality that "every man is content with his share." Is it not the nature of knowing, to *know*? And all the difficulties it meets in this enterprise rather defer than cancel this original assurance: the studied and measured modesties of Hume and Kant leave it skeptical rather of them than of itself. It may be right! And so of the essence of other powers and qualities of the mind: it is not a positive infinitude or omnipotence which consciousness asserts of itself, it is a "negative wholeness." And since this general sense of poten-

tiality is a part of that apperceptive mass with which one encounters every new task and situation, it is properly included in the content of the subconscious.

The various ingredients of subconsciousness which we have thus reviewed begin to exhibit, not a miscellany, but a quasi-organic character of pertinence one to another. It is active, selective attention which focuses consciousness on this and that object from the midst of a field of objects, thus throwing the greater part of the field into the "margin"; it is likewise an active, selective intention which focuses the trend of action and throws the rest of a thousand incipient impulses into the limbo of non-selected, perhaps repressed, ideas-of-action. But nothing can be discarded or repressed except for the sake of something taken as of greater worth for the purpose in hand. It is the "apperceptive mass" both of memory and of potentiality which is giving experience this structure: but this is only a more analytic way of saying that "I," as a felt system of powers and possibilities, attend, evaluate, choose, discard, both among my objects and among my impulses toward those



objects: *the ingredients of "subconsciousness" are empirical ingredients of myself*—of the self which hovers over experience, the inclusive, observing and judging self. This self, we may say, is subconscious to itself; or conversely, what we call subconsciousness, so far from being a sort of mental sub-basement, is at the center of selfhood, and the invidious term "subconsciousness" is an inept recognition of the fact that the primary springs of selfhood are not habitually at the focus of its outgoing interests.

Our chief concern here is to do away with those travesties of the self which neglect its empirical aspects, or present them, as it were, in the flat—like a mural painting spread out in one dimension, or like a "stream of consciousness" whose whole sense lies in the surface layer, however it may be disturbed by irrelevant bubblings from slimy depths below. Those older descriptions which presented the self as a "union of opposites" had at least the advantage of recognizing that the self has depth and inner duality,—not merely factual superfice, dismissible in a list of "contents." The self observes itself, judges itself, directs itself, controls itself, places itself in

the world; and both as judging and as judged it is directly known to us. We have now to indicate some of the bearings of this empirical duality.

#### TRAITS OF THE TWO SELVES

For the sake of brevity, we may refer to the two aspects of the self we have been distinguishing as two selves: the self which is within the world, and the self which contemplates the world from a point not within the world, and in this sense includes the world. We might designate these two selves (invidiously) as the selves of the lower level and of the upper level, or (inaccurately) as the observed and the observing selves. We might better call them the "excursive" and the "reflective" selves. The word "excursive" simply implies that the self-within-the-world is a self of behavior, entangled in affairs; and that these affairs have the value of excursions, in the sense that they report their results back again to the center from which the foray issued. If consciousness were a "stream" it would go on and on with no attachments and no re-issuings: but as a series or system of excursions, each one launched under a working

hypothesis subject to revision, we understand that it has its returns, its incessant new beginnings with equally incessant accumulation of meaning. The reflective self, behind scenes, is the constant judge, guide, initiator of this excursive activity.

The self passes into the lower level, or into excursion, in the process of "decision" of which we were speaking earlier, whereby it becomes involved in dates, local circumstances and other irrelevant particulars. Each excursion, under the aegis of a single decision, has a unity of its own, its "idea." An "excursion" is a far more significant unit of mental life than, let us say, a "sensation" or a "feeling"; it constitutes a paragraph of personal history, with an integral time-epoch of its own, long or short. The excursive self has thus a marked pluralism and discontinuity, though the intricate pattern made by the overlapping of numerous simultaneous excursions gives it the semblance of an irregular, eddying flow. Meantime the reflective self (recognizable as the self of detachment in our earlier discussion) is uninterrupted in its survey, maintaining its own independence and reserve from the entanglements of the

attached, occupied and dated self: its cumulative judgments of that self and of its reports contribute to the building of that "apperceptive mass" which is its empirical substance.

The self has been called a "union of opposites"; we have already indicated that this tantalizing conception has one advantage—it is not a flat-wash conception of selfhood. Perhaps we may rescue this phrase from some of its obscurity and at the same time develop our notion of the self as a reflective-excursive system, by pointing out that the opposing qualities, which the self has been said to unite, tend to distribute themselves unequally to these two aspects or selves, now sufficiently distinguished.

Thus, the self is said to unite the *actual and the potential*; and this is true. Indeed, it is only in a self that an actual possibility can be found, and this only on the assumption that the self is "free," i.e., that the alternatives which appear before it in the moment of decision are real alternatives. In the process of decision, some of these possibilities disappear; one or more become "actualized." Hence the potential is the special province of the reflec-

tive self; the actual is the special province of the excursive and dated self.

In a similar way, the proposal that the self is a union of *finite and infinite* can be given an empirical meaning. The reflective self is infinite in the sense we have already indicated; it enjoys that "negative wholeness" which in various directions is unaware of limit. The excursive self has the accepted finitude of decision, which limits itself to the narrow field of possibility it intends to actualize; and its achievement has the finitude of every actual fact.

These contrasts are imperfectly outlined: I merely indicate them, and pass on to the antithesis which now chiefly concerns us. The self is said to be a union of *the temporal and the eternal*; and again the statement is true, but in need of interpretation. It may indicate to us that the reflective self and the excursive self stand in different relations to time. This is a fact of experience; and here I feel that our empirical psychology lags behind contemporary physics in recognizing the inner complexity of our consciousness of time.

The excursive self, as we have said, is pre-eminently the dated self. It is immersed in

the time-flow of the physical environment with which it deals. Physics inclines to utilize its sense of the present moment, its "now," to define physical simultaneity of near-by events.

The reflective self experiences the time-order as it does the space-order in a roomier fashion as an unbounded whole within which the several time-positions of excursive activity are placed, as also the whole arc of the excursion, its beginning and end. The discontinuities of action are set in an unbroken continuity, which is time itself. For the physical world and for the listening ear the fugue is fugitive; its successive notes drop out of being as they arise. For reflection the whole flight is felt at once, and it is possible to take mental possession of its total course, without which it has no meaning. Yet the character of temporal succession is not lost: on the contrary, unless elements of succession were known together, there could be only a flight of nows—succession itself would remain unknown. This capacity to hold successive moments in consciousness at once without losing their time-spread is familiar to philosophers—familiar as one of the standing wonders

of experience which still awaits satisfactory interpretation. The word "eternal" seems to me not alone unnecessarily baffling, but misleading, as though it were something in contrast with time, instead of what it is: the very essence of the time order. For time can constitute an order only when its multitude of elements are taken as members of a class, held in one thought. For the reflective self, the time-continuum is held as a single fact in "negative wholeness"—not as an actual infinitude, but without sense of beginning or end, at once. It takes no longer to contemplate a thousand years than to contemplate ten minutes: and yet—this is the miracle—each may be thought of in its true extent. In this sense, time is within the reflective self, whereas the dated self is in time. The reflective self is not timeless, nor out of time: it has its own acts of decision and moments of review which are dated: yet in a single act it pervades all time.

It is only for the self that time spreads itself out in its true character. For the physical world, the past is pure past—it was but is not—and the future is pure future. For the facts of memory and anticipation there is no physical

analogue, not even in the brain: for present traces of past events are not remembrance. Nature makes its own records, such as the geologist reads in the rocks; they are completely devoid of temporal quality except for the mind that reads them—superposition is translated as lateness, etc. In complex structures there may be signs of wear which indicate, again to the reader, processes long continued. But in the ultimate ingredients of nature there can be no sign of wear: energy itself has no age. Imagine a perfect pendulum, frictionless, oscillating in a vacuum over a heavy body—a closed system alone in the universe: what would there be to distinguish the tenth oscillation from the ninth, or these from the ten-billionth? Nothing. It would be a clock without a record, devoid of every sign of its own duration, always "*herrlich, wie am ersten Tag!*" This agelessness of the ultimate physical facts is at once glorious and appalling: there is no time-summation in the roots of nature. Entropy itself is ignorant of its own history. But for a being with a memory, items may accumulate and retain their distinctness and their place forever, without crowd-



ing, because the mental time-order is a true additional dimension of being, not another of the simultaneous dimensions of space.

Remembrance is thus a veritable immortalization of events which would otherwise be gone. Their endurance is conferred, and conferred by the reflective self. The monuments we earlier referred to as physical aids to the memory of the dead, are indeed less fragile than the human organism in the ordinary physical environment; but in themselves they are present facts, commemorating nothing: they are but parts of a circuit by which memory aids itself to its own goal. Memory is not an automatic, mechanical, indifferent retention of everything that strays into experience. Just as attention fixes on what is significant now, so memory fastens on what may be significant hereafter, both pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Thus the self builds its own history, and the contours of this individual past remain plastic, as its estimates of value vary: under a newly conceived distaste, treasured episodes may be relegated to the indistinguishable mass, old prides may be rejected by a new shame, and former shames lift up their heads with arrived self-

confidence. Deeds are irrevocable; the past is irrevocable; but the immortalizations of memory remain subject to an altering—presumably improving—judgment of what is fit to endure.

It is not enough, in view of all this, to say that the reflective self “surveys” time, or perceives it as an independent object. Time is, to be sure, an objective character of the world; but it is a character which reaches no totality except in reflective selfhood. This raises the surmise that the reflective self is involved in the being of time, and is therefore durable in its own nature.

The excursive self is transitional, intentionally time-limited, a passage aware of its own transit. The reflective self in observing the time-flow distinguishes itself from that flow, but also continues through it. The excursive self is not alone a system of finite time-flights: it is subject to lapses, breaches, interruptions; it flickers, wanders, goes out during sleep, resumes life on waking not by any grace of its own but by grace—it seems—of more reliable bodily processes which mend and bridge the abandoned continuities. But why is this self, upon waking, the *same self*? Is it indeed

because of the faithfulness of the physical world it deals with? Is it because this body and these walls are the same body and the same walls as yesterday? But the body and the walls of yesterday are gone: the body is indeed the same, but it is wholly incapable of presenting the self with the knowledge of that fact—it can work in the moment, it cannot retain its own past. It is the self which recognizes its body as the same; the physical constancy would be meaningless were it not for the underlying constancy of memory. And its self-recognition is dependent far less on these its physical loyalties than on a deeper loyalty, namely, to its own interests and problems. The problem to which I awake this morning is not “similar” to the one I laid down last night: it is the identical problem, and will remain the same until the solution is found, through years if need be, over whatever gaps and absences of consciousness. This problem remains the same because I remain the same: it is “my” problem. And since a life span may be considered as the course of a single problem unremittingly pursued, the reflective self has an empirical duration at least as long. The subconscious self does not

relax its hold on time. And it has resources to hold the excursive self to its own identity: if in years past I have made a promise, and performance is now due, the reflective self may acknowledge the debt, and in so doing establish the moral identity of selfhood underneath a thousand changes. The reflective self administers the time-dimension both for the excursive self and for its world of nature.

We have been witnessing in our own day a renewed contest between two ancient philosophies, the philosophy of substance and the philosophy of flux, and on the whole the flux philosophy has come to dominance. To this view—which found a preliminary voice in Hume—the self figures as the shining example of a dethroned substance. As the substance of a physical object has been replaced by reliable laws of coexistence and change, so the substance of self has been replaced by laws of sequence among mental contents, or by a principle of transmission in which, instead of true memory, we have a perennially reconstituted atmosphere of inheritance.

This polemic has been an aid to clarity. We are well rid of that material pellet which

lurked under the shell of the substantial "soul." But the newer philosophies of flux have also to be superseded. What we are now witnessing is the passing of both types, and their displacement by a truer account of change and endurance than can be given by either. If the substance-philosophers have unconsciously worshiped a stone, the flux-philosophers have been unintentional worshipers of death—for when change is ultimate, death becomes permanent.

The flux-philosophy has been fascinated by the spurts and starts and flickerings of the dated self; and abetted by the incompleteness of empirical psychology has been ready to assume that the self has no account to give of its own persistences. It has not noticed that it is the *self which observes its own flickering*, which it could not do unless it also possessed a stabler mode of being, such as we are now finding in the reflective self. Unless there is something deeper than flux, flux can never know its own being.

We have one more opposition to record. The reflective self is a creative self and the dated self is its creature.

In all decision there is a possibility to be realized by way of some deed which affects the objective patterns of things. But also in all decisions there lurks an image—commonly a vaguer image—of a possible self which is being achieved. I choose to enter medicine, I choose to be a physician: what I do and what I become are inseparable. Jules de Gaultier suggested in his *Bovarysme* that we are all bent on becoming what we are not and have no native gift for being—attracted perversely by the unreachable. In which bit of extravagance there is this truth, that we find out what it is in us to be, in part by attempting many rôles for which we have no gift, until this self of unlimited self-confidence, instructed by its excursions, discovers who it *can be*, and aims to become that person.

Self-consciousness we have, as a momentary structural fact of experience; but the completion of self-consciousness is the task of a lifetime, and the general principle holds that we best understand that which we have made. Through the increments of countless decisions, the self which I become is the self which I can understand and objectify because I have been largely its maker. It is "I," as

nearly as I can put myself into this medium—yet, as a product, it is somewhat other than my self. It is, let us say, the best version of myself I can now achieve, within this context and at this date; I have stuck by the original canvas; it is marred by erasures and new beginnings; I cannot pretend it a full success; of the infinitude of possibility I have dreamed, the unrealized exceeds what has been brought into being. The finite drawn out from the unlimited leaves the unlimited. Yet it has been a life to do it.

With these distinctions in mind between the two selves which constitute our working human self—the reflective self, which is (relatively) potential, infinite, time-inclusive, time-continuous, creative; the excursive self, which is (relatively) actual, finite, time-limited, time-discontinuous, created—we may now return to review the meanings of death.

## VI

### FURTHER MEANINGS OF DEATH

**I**N OUR earlier view of the meanings of death we remarked how there may grow through the normal courses of living an individual willingness to die and a capacity for the renunciation of life. There remained a mystery in that willingness: it is irrational if death means the extinction of the subject of consciousness. It raised a doubt whether the human individual were realizing all he renounced or whether he were still blinded by his instinctive adoption of the social view of his passing.

We can now see the basis for that doubt. It is a simple matter to contemplate one's death. But when one does so, one does it *as a survivor*! Within oneself there is reproduced an element of social objectivity: it is the inclusive or reflective self which contemplates the death of the dated, excursive self, and is half able to accept it. The self does not contemplate nor know how to contemplate its



own extinction. It can define itself as not being or as ceasing to be; but it remains the definer, unable to abandon itself in the meaning of those words, and unable to realize what an experience of coming to an absolute end might be. There could be no such experience. For to know that "This is the end" one must already see beyond that end, and know that there is nothing there: to assert, "I now die" is either an anticipation or a guess whose truth would be an accident. To gather the meaning of extinction one must both vanish and continue to be; the effort to realize death results in a sharpened awareness of that duality within self with which we have been dealing.

In our first thoughts about death we were in effect making use of that duality. The question is now raised whether the inclusive self could be reasonably conceived as a surviving self; and what, under such a view, the further meaning of death may be.

In any case, death remains death.

For any self, death must be an interruption—a break at an arbitrary point, so far as the self can see. If there is never sufficient

reason for ending a conversation, still less can there be sufficient reason for the simultaneous cutting of all the strands of a human career. The best-concluded life is unprepared at the moment, is checked in the swing of an arm, in the flow of a pen, in the unravelling of a new-seen puzzle, in the training of a child. It is the destiny of the dated self not to be completed at any moment—that half-painted picture, that unfinished symphony, that partly-plowed field, that deserted campaign, that almost grasped idea! These are the broken edges of history, left forever as futurist images of action-going-on . . . and in so far truer to the living self than the repose of a patly concluded task, too much like the eternalized image of Lot's wife congealed in an attitude of retrospect.

What is thus broken off must be relinquished. But if the dated self is gone, is there in the reflective self any greater capacity for life? Is it by itself a complete being, or is it like one of those indestructible nonentities of the older Platonism or of the classical idealistic fancy? A merely subconscious, reflective, judging self with none of those characters of individuality, sensation, body,

objects, empirical undertakings, conversation, would be as little of a person as a pure transcendental ego. The reflective self after all is but one aspect of a vital division of labor, and means little or nothing apart from its more empirical partner.

The answer depends on noting that the reflective self is something more than this name implies; potentiality is as near to its essence as contemplation; it is an unlimited nest of possibilities hardly broached, and a capacity to bring them into particular existence. We have spoken of it as creative and also as free. One's view of survival turns on what these too-fluent terms mean in one's philosophy.

The freedom of decision has sometimes been pictured as a sort of mechanical coin-flipping to lend an arbitrary over-weight to one of two balanced alternatives. This is as poor a version of decision as could well be conceived. The self, in deliberating, is not occupied with a common stock of conventional alternatives. Bach's music was not eternally laid up in heaven, and extracted by him from an endless store of pre-existing musical ideas: it was not so much as *possible* until Bach conceived it. This idle idea of an infinite

grab-bag of eternal possibilities, from which finite deciders draw now a red ball, now a white, as pleases their fancy, assumes that no finite mind does more than reproduce and give flesh to a few of the infinite multitude of an eternal repertoire of universals: but the human will is not engaged in mere duplication. The field of alternative possibilities into which the self looks is first of all a field stocked by its own imagination, derived from a thousand sources and yet in every line its own product. It is impossible for two minds to contemplate the same concrete alternatives, though they be given the same names; for to each mind the alternatives become at once "what I can make of them." The world in which the deliberating mind operates is an "other" world with its own space-time order; it intends to superpose this imagined world, when its conception is satisfactory, upon the "actual" world, and in the act of decision construct a perfect splice! It confers actuality upon the dream of its own making. Thus Bach adds to the universe, when he pens his music, something which without his invention the universe would not have had and something which God himself had never

thought. Thus the reflective self, drawing its hints from the experience of a multitude of excursions, gives back to history always more than it receives. And the self which it makes is a self which it alone has conceived.

If this account of decision is true, the terms freedom and creativity applied to human action have a certain literal force. The self gives actuality to possibilities; and *it has first made these possibilities*. Within the limits of its own conceiving and doing it is as real as what otherwise exists in the world. It would presumably remain something, and viable, even if the dated self it had built were obliterated. Death would then have a further meaning:

Death would mean, for the reflective self, the birth of its child, the dated self, and separation from it—release from its growing burden.

That child it leaves, in one sense dying in the moment of birth, in another sense the permanent possession of this present fabric of history. That individual is completed, fills its personal name with the meaning it will always carry, has a social continuance in the ramifying delta of its effects, vicariously en-

joys that immortality of works and of remembrance which many would substitute for personal survival.

But death would also mean the persistence of the maternal prowess of the reflective self within which lie germs of other gestations.

Hence it would not necessarily mean loss of individuality, nor of sensation, nor of body, nor of objects. For in this creativity of the reflective self there lies the possibility of relation to other worlds which are also actual worlds. The self, in its freedom, is always standing as the bridge of connection between plural space-time orders. One of these is pre-eminently "actual," though it has no monopoly of reality: it is actual because it is the space-time world of a certain group of fellow selves, with whom this self is now in active intercourse by way of "this" nature, and "this" body. This group of fellow selves need not be the only such group in the universe, defining by their interplay a particular "world of nature." If there are other such groups, the death of this dated self would mean the severance of connection with this particular group of selves; it would conceivably be the occasion for beginning connection with another group.

Death would then mean the withdrawal of an insertion, the crumbling of a system of intercourse, the cessation of receptivity to this particular outer world. It might well mean reversion to a moment of latent being, a period of transition—since the transitions from world-order to world-order are intramental—reaching out for new pertinency and new belonging. And presumably the otherness to which the instinctive groping of the nuclear self would reach would be not simply moreness of such as one has had, but the dawning as well of new types of being, and of deeper categories of thought into which such modes of living as this may be involuted and understood with a more adequate power of knowing.

The acquired power to see life as a whole and the dated self as an object distinct from myself, which living brings, brings also the power to conceive a radical “otherness” in the universe. Death completes the meaning of the term “this” as applied to this life and this self; and therewith a possible other is given its completest meaning. There are shallow “others” in abundance scattered throughout experience—other places, other tasks, other

persons, other ideas; but death unless it is an end announces the thoroughgoing other, the other life. If it is not an end, it is a *stroke of counting* in the profoundest tally of the world; and this tally may signify the gong of passage from the labored sketch to the freedom of a new canvas, or from the apprenticeship in creativity to the exercise of a maturer art.

Putting away the unfinished work of the dated self may then be looked on, if not with less regret, at least with full recognition of the measure of its release from what was irrational. (This is the truth which Plato felt and mistook as a release from the body.) For death would mean sifting away the accidental specifications, destroying manacles, emancipation from connections in part stultifying, breaking away from relationships whose freshness had run down, maintained by a humiliating momentum, as of lives barnacled on one another—the cessation of attachments that have ceased to stimulate, the ending of a career declining or destined to decline in inner fertility. Fertility runs down through a deficiency of otherness. And death, bringing one to the “other of all this,” may be the method



whereby aging beings, such as minds are, can recover not alone that inner agelessness which belongs to physical energy, but the whole freshness and meaning of that past set of belongings which had begun, unjustly, to forfeit its savor.

✍ The one thing that death would not mean, under these suppositions, is eternal rest.

For continuance can have no sense unless the reflective self is concrete and active, carrying on that questioning which is the identity of its life here and through all possible lives, and through whatever changes of categories. If death means rest and sleep, death is final. There is, we think, too much soul's ease in this conception, and nothing to support it but the weariness of aging muscles, and the decline of values, belonging to that dated self, which is weary and shall have peace. For the surviving self, death must be the renewal of that negative wholeness of the subconscious self which is its innocence of limitation. It would mean passage to another effort, with revised direction, in an ampler world.

As a consolation for incompetence and de-

feat, the concept of another life has no legitimate use: it has every use for the continued will to understand the sense of suffering and thwart. The continued craving for that which is not, that restless anxiety and pain, which lies at the core of our being—that deep-buried burning concern which the pessimist misinterprets as the defeat of our happiness—that is in reality the soul's loyalty to its own goal, its underlying faithfulness to its destiny. It is the best indication that this infinitude of possibility, unfulfilled even in the most fortunate, rests on the underground waters of being as a compass whose direction the currents of reality are to honor. If any selves go on, they are selves that suffer; but they are also the lovers of life, not its haters.

## VII

### WHAT OUGHT TO BE

WE HAVE been speaking of possibilities, not of proofs. If we are right, the common grounds on which survival is excluded as impossible vanish upon examination. The improbabilities are rejected as impertinent. And the idea of another life, though it lends itself neither to verification by us nor to imaginability, is not devoid of meaning.

But herewith the office of analysis is done. Our thoughts are released by these findings. But our eventual judgment will be determined by other things, such as these: *analogy*—analogies and contrasts between the rhythm of life and death and other rhythms our course of life is subject to, or analogy with other deaths which are in life, as of childhood or of suppressed selfhood, and the rebirths which succeed them; *attunement*—finding a just balance of judgment in the perpetual tension in ourselves between a sobriety which may be dull and unseeing and a vision which may

be visionary; *valuing*—a total sense of the fitness or rightness of one fate or another. All these belong to the domain of intuition, our resultant intuition about the world we inhabit.

I wish now to summon you to such an intuition as the reflections of this hour may afford, and in preparation for that effort to make note of one truth which has less repute than it deserves: the truth that *duration is a dimension of value*.

It is common to suppose that quality alone is important; and that when experience has a satisfactory or noble quality, prolongation adds nothing to its worth. One hears the phrase “mere continuance,” and thinks with aversion of a purely animal tenacity of being, willing to spin out through endless time the torpor of a tortoise or the vegetable somnolence of a sequoia. To experience happiness or greatness or intensity or elevation or ecstasy for an instant—that is held to be the goal; and then one may vanish content. And doubtless if the choice were between a long-continued humdrum and a brief flash of flame, it is better to be able to say “I have lived”

than to say "I have lasted." But these are not the only alternatives. And for the one who, being gone, is no longer able to look back and say "I have lived," there is no better and no worse.

It is the normal destiny of experience to be prolonged in proportion to its height, not inversely. The best of our experiences are normally long looked-forward-to and long remembered: whether the event itself is brief or extended, its time-room is measured by the period of its occupation of consciousness in prospect, experience, and retrospect. Without this natural time-dimension we know we have not "done justice" to the event: meanings may be seen instantly, but they are not "realized" (by beings with our time-extended mode of thinking) except with a certain amplitude of the process of pondering. Deprived of their due aftergrowth they fail to attain their proper value.

But if time is a dimension of value, it is not a problem to be settled by introspective questioning or questionnairing whether one does or does not desire to continue his life: life is objectively worth more as a continued than as a closed affair. We instinctively know

this to be the case. As the impression prevails that this natural world is the only world, and this life the only life, there arises also a minor point of morals: "Do not waste time thinking about death; live well the time you have, and forget that it ends." For to remember that there is an absolute end does something, in spite of good will, to cut the nerve of present effort. But what sort of realism is this, and what sort of universe, when it becomes a duty not to dwell on the facts? Especially such a fact as the end of individual consciousness, which is pertinent to every undertaking of that individual.

One symptom of this curious unrealism of the realistic bent is a set of fallacies it begets, as it seeks to replace the thought of individual extinction with more hopeful themes.

We are urged to remember that the race goes on, society goes on, institutions go on, and probably "progress": humanity will reach its ideal. The continuance of the social whole may compensate for the loss of the individual. But this is the plausible *fallacy of totalism*. Unless the individual continuance is secure, there is no security for the race.

From the point of view of naturalism, the presence on this obscure planet of the conditions suitable to human life or to any life is a rare accident, and in all probability a transitory one: there are many possible events, slight in the scale of cosmic happenings, which would effectively terminate it. It retains its place precariously, at the courtesy of forces it can hardly know nor measure, and which in turn neither know nor care for it. If, then, the individual survives his death in another environment, something of the racial wealth of meaning may be kept when the race is gone. If the individual perishes, the prospect for the race and all its mental treasures is extinction. It is thus the individual who must secure the race, not the race the individual.

We are also urged to remember that new individuals always replace the old, and presumably of a slowly rising mental and moral stature. But no new consciousness can replace the consciousness of the old; for there is a definite value in the continuous climb from zero, and in its remembrance. The meaning of things is increased by the cumulation of the past with which one thinks them: no one knows what an achievement is who does not

know the tentatives in which it began. To suppose that new values can stand full-fledged by themselves is one form of the *fallacy of isolation*: new value is relative to the whole of a preceding history. The loss of memories from the world would thus be a clear and irreparable loss of meaning.

But suppose that individuals do not survive, what things in the universe *are* eternal?

Many sorts of thing have been conceived as everlasting—space and time, atoms, the total energy of the world, the sum of energy and mass, the ageless ultimates of physical analysis. Or delivering all particulars over to flux, then ideas and truths and laws of change; for these cannot cease to be themselves nor to be true, whether or not they are known.

Now of all these objects, no one of them knows its own eternity. These ultimate physical units, or the vast world-room itself, or the silent, incessant administration of natural law—none of these knows that it is lasting. Nor are the Platonic ideas aware of their immortality!

But if lastingness is a mark of value, is it



not an absurdity of a universe in which the everlasting things are things which do not know and cannot become aware of their post of honor?

And since it is we who have discovered or surmised their perpetuity and thus in our thought have imputed immortality to them, shall we—so liberal of a continuance which things cannot understand—be the ones to perish from the scene?

It is in such rejections of absurdity that the intuitions of mankind most clearly speak—more clearly than in a positive affirmation that immortality must be true.

There are those who affirm their certainty of survival. And for many persons there are occasional moments in which that positive sense of indestructibleness emerges and then subsides. It comes, not as a sporadic emotional exaggeration of the sense of life, but as something seen and clearly judged; as if one had been admitted for an instant to the weighing-places of the powers of the universe, and had perceived that this sort of thing, the self, cannot be destroyed by *that*! It is akin to the immediate awareness of freedom, as the capac-

ity to initiate change from a point just outside the circuit of natural causes; it may be another phase of the same thing. It is, I believe, what Plato meant when he said that there is something in the nature of life which cannot mingle with death. And there are some—I am not among them—who have never doubted that life goes on.

To most of us, I presume, intuitive assurance can go no farther than this: we know that death plows deep, but not to the bottom: it does not break the links and cables of renewal.

But do we not also know that survival *ought to be*? Perhaps it is some false modesty of the soul, some cosmic *mauvaise honte*, which hesitates to press that original *right to endure*, of which we first spoke. This modest trait doubts whether human judgments of what is fit and right would hold for the wider universe; it is governed by a sense of the relativity of the human valuations, especially when one judges one's own case. But such mock meekness—a popular pretence of our time—carries the notion of relativity farther than it is capable of going. For if in the long run our values are to be reversed, then our

“great” becomes “small” and our “small” “great”; our “part” becomes “the whole”; we who are puny fragments change places with the universe, and our attempt at supreme self-abnegation turns into the sublimest arrogance. And if our values are not to be reversed, then something of them remains valid. It is impossible to reject what our deepest judgment of fitness asserts; and we may make bold to think that what seems to us irrational cannot in any wider exploration of the world prove to be the truth.

Intuition cannot be wholly wrong. We have reason, however, to be suspicious of a false perspective. We must beware of converting a persuasion that survival must be possible into a conviction that survival is necessary and universal. Survival might conceivably result from an inherent indestructibility; but it might also result from the happy accident that destructive forces pass one by, or from the protection of an outside power or from compliance with a law. Plato would have the soul such a being that no power in the cosmos could either make or unmake it: it is a monad he thought, which can

have no beginning, nor ever cease to be even at its own ardent desire. But it seems unlikely that the resources and powers of the individual self are such as to shoulder their way to permanence without reference to the world beyond it. Besides the intuition of continuance, we have also an intuition of dependence—some would say of “absolute dependence”: one is as valid as the other. The analogy of human history may be of some aid here; for there is a sort of artificial immortality there provided not by one’s own force but by the state. There is no inherent imperishability of any human work, not even of a Shakspearean sonnet: such works endure only so long as ordered human society endures and preserves them; and the state, intending to be undying, lends to human society its own permanence. Human deeds thus borrow their immortality from the state, which traffics in that article; and man makes the state! So perhaps in the cosmic order, there is a thing essentially eternal; and there may be conditions under which the human self participates in its quality.

In my own view, this is the case: survival of death is a possibility but not a necessity of

destiny. We have begun this present existence without our prior consent (a mode of entrance inappropriate for a self-sufficient, indestructible atom). Some presumption of a retroactive consent may be seen in the channels of mental heredity, through which the momentum of parental will-to-live might run to the newborn. But being here, we constitute ourselves judges and administrators of the worth of living; and what we come to conceive as fit tends, I believe, to come to pass in each one's personal destiny. If there were a soul in whom living had bred a genuine aversion, through conscious cultivation of a distaste for life,—if there were such a soul, I cannot think it doomed against its will to go on. Or, what is more imaginable, if one became determined to deal with this life as a unique and completed whole, coinciding with the career of the body, satisfied to define himself as the rational animal ending in nothing—I can hardly think survival a necessity for such a soul (though I suspect in most who profess this attitude subconscious counter-currents which may eventuate in an agreeable disappointment!). In any event, the quality of the human self, as I conceive it, is

not immortality but immortability, the conditional possibility of survival.

What these conditions of survival may be, the world has many surmises, and no one fully knows. They are not written in a book. They are not revealed by any final authority. They are not vested in any person. Still less are they the private perquisite of any society or historic tradition. They are not a set of rules discernible in mystic states or discovered by esoteric discipline. They are not divine codes meant to deflect conduct from its human grooves by setting a great prize for conformity. These represent aberrations of the human hope reaching out for definition, and illustrate the handles which every great hope offers the exploiter.

Neither does any man know fully through self-consciousness what in himself might render him viable beyond death. He does not so much as know what it is that keeps him alive in his present situation. It must be something simple, for it is so natural to live, to think, to be—so little of an effort—so little a possible object of effort. He knows something, at any rate, of what it is not: it is not

natural prowess, nor acquired capacities, nor any proud work of the excursive self. If anything can see him through the crisis of death it will be as near to him as breathing, and as elusive as that which now keeps him in being. If there are conditions for survival, they must be as simple as the saying, "As a man thinketh (of himself) in his heart, so is he," and as natural as the passage by growth from one stage of readiness to another. Perhaps our figure of the germinal self may offer an inkling: the process of living this present life *well* might render the fertile soul pregnant with otherness, and unknown to itself gravitant toward a new birth.

This is consonant with flashes of insight which have lighted the race, have been embodied in its saviors, and, treasured in the great traditions, have constituted their valid essence. They indicate that survival may be a matter of the *degree of reality* which the self attains. For the reality of the self is not a fixed quantity: the self is more or less real, more or less a cherisher of illusion, more or less sham and pretence and self-deceit; the deepest law of duty is to put off falsities and achieve what reality we are capable of. And

this achievement has doubtless something to do with one's power to love, since it is the nature of love to penetrate through show and artifice to the inner realities of things. One is as real, we said, as what one can create out of oneself; and only the lover knows what to create, and how. The durability of the self, we think, must depend much on the truth of its interpretation of love—itsself a riddle deeper than that of the Sphinx, and slaying its tens of thousands for their guilty-false guesses; for love, which as Plato saw is a longing to make immortal, is also in its promise a power to become immortal: "he that loveth aright is born of the immortal One."

And of that outer fact on which survival depends, we can know this, that "substance" and "energy" are not its final names: it is not these which, when a man dies, will receive what entered into him, as a quantum of magnetic dust. For death is not the erasure of life by an entity called Death, nor by an entity called Nature. Death is an encounter of the real with the Real: and the Real, whatever it is, is conscious and living, not inanimate.

Perhaps this is all we need to know of the ways and conditions of survival; but what



we chiefly know is that *it ought to be*. For unless there is a way for the continuance of the human self, the world is full of the blunt edges of human meanings, the wreckage of human values, and therefore of the failures of God.

## EPILOGUE

THE notion of survival has no direct empirical standing, no place in the business of science. In philosophy, it is a last chapter, an appendix, a footnote to other matters.

Just on this account, for human life in the concrete, that is to say, for religion, it is the most important of all dogmas. For here a faltering yet radically vital individual insight most needs the considered corroboration of the racial sense.

— This dogma is now largely evaded or mummied by religious institutions, or poetized out of literal sense, or abandoned as a casualty in the path of scientific advance, because their special networks of doctrine have barred the conception from newly living perspectives, rendered useful access to it difficult to themselves, and made its imagery obnoxious to the sounder instincts of mankind.

THE END

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*INTERLUDE:*  
*A SYMPOSIUM*  
*ON THE*  
*MEANING OF LIFE*

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**I**T IS not usual to ask people point-blank what they consider the meaning of their own lives or of life in general. Nevertheless, the question is one on which most mature people have meditated at some time or other; for whether or not anyone has put the question into so many words, experience is sure to have put it sooner or later, rudely and silently. It is perhaps the one speculative question on which everybody has a view, based on pertinent evidence; and further, on which all sober views are weighty. For what a man thinks his life means, comes very close to what he thinks he is.

Attack some person, then—someone, if you like, whose life seems to be carried on with a healthy, naïve, unquestioned conviction that it means something—attack him abruptly with the question what he conceives that meaning to be. The chances are that he will be surprised. The chances are also that he will have some sort of significant answer ready, to the equal surprise of the questioner. He will probably profess his answer accidental

and inadequate; it will doubtless be so; but it will have in it a fragment of the sense of human existence.

To bring a number of such fragments together may be a useful prelude to a later technical analysis.

# I

## THE WORTH OF MERE BEING ALIVE

**M**OST human beings, we say, meditate on the meaning of life; but few of them drive these meditations to a clear picture of their final aims. One reason for this lies in the fact that the simple going-on of living has an intrinsic satisfaction of its own, which philosophers commonly forget, but which is never far from the surface of common sense. Our questioner may find some answers to the effect that the meaning of life is in being alive!

This is far from being an empty answer. There is a certain pseudo-futurity about the values of living, by which the prophets of flux are systematically taken in—and by which humanity frequently takes itself in until it bethinks itself. Conversation, for example, professes to flow toward some result; but toward what result? Conversation is seldom so much for the sake of developing ideas as for the sake of being with a friend, maintaining

active consciousness of his presence. The same is true to some extent of all activity: apart from the ends toward which it aims, and which make its excuse for being, action enhances the direct awareness of being alive which requires no further justification, but which on the contrary goes far to justify the pain of action.

On its lower level, the fact of being conscious is directly enjoyed: an infant requires no "end." And this conscious level is so far held to for its own sake that it resists dropping into a still lower level even for sleep, as if it knew that to be aware of things is intrinsically better than not to be aware of them. This is the mental counterpart of the property sometimes regarded as the primary character of organic life—self-maintenance: perhaps it is the original from which that organic self-maintenance is derived. Wherever the world-process develops a new "emergent," it seems to set at the same time an automatic guard like a notch or ratchet which keeps the new attainment from slipping back. Thus, when mind emerges, it will tend to maintain mentality through simply enjoying mentality.

In the human being, this animal self-en-



joyment has become something more, an enjoyment of being intelligent—of judging, thinking, deciding. An infant repeats the name it has learned for no ultimate purpose but for the pure joy of mental action—the mastery of the new word is not the object but an incident of the mental play. For the adult man there is the same kind of pleasure in making an observation; to the logician the observation may be an “induction” or a “deduction”; but to the man himself it may be a quip, a comment, a witticism, a “piece of his mind,”—nothing but a sample of his own type of world-awareness.

This immediate sense of worth in living accounts to some extent for the human phenomenon of “idling.” The state of mind of the typically “worthless” man is seldom that of a pessimist, nor is it necessarily unintelligent. The uneconomic man, primitive or other, who drifts and “basks,” vaguely interested in the round of nature and in momentary events, with the gossipy consciousness of the pure spectator—this man is no animal. He may be a parasite, a loafer, a porch-rocker, a dowager living on deceased husband’s income, any sort of consumer who fails to produce,

looked at with semi-envious, semi-murderous eyes by the economic intelligence: but at least he is the sociological exaggeration who demonstrates what on the activity-theory of worth ought to be impossible, that merely to live may be a sufficient worth.

And he may be much more. He may be, in dumb way, accepting the Universe and his part in it, "glorifying God" and beginning to "enjoy Him forever." The Balinese, according to Geoffrey Gover, carry this capacity for human immediacy to the level of art:

Here men equal their surroundings. It is not only their comeliness or even their frank enjoyment of life, but also that they make of their life a complete art-integration. . . . And their most moving spectacles . . . are to the Balinese themselves not at all artistic performances but religious rituals in which there is no room for a non-participating audience.

This is the holiday consciousness which civilized man attains perfectly only in exceptional moments. To achieve it more truly he may retreat, with Gauguin or Norman Hall, to Tahiti. But he cannot remain there and retain his sanity; for he cannot become

the Tahitian or the Balinese who does not know the world such a modern has left. The goings-on of that modern world, however he may abhor them, continue to infect his retreat, and his sense of worth refers itself to them. When the world is in a stew, he cannot get satisfactory "meaning" in the South Seas, nor in the divinest human immediacy. He feels his joy a stolen one, and touches in its elemental form the Puritan's sense of sin. The enjoyment of immediate worth functions for the normal man as a ground note, entering into every chord, but seldom acting alone.

Play, which has no age-limit, shows the lurking presence of this immediate value-sense. It is peculiar to childhood only in the sense that all the activities of children enjoy the immediate pleasure of action: doing the next thing always carries meaning enough. The suggestions of instinct act as starters of action; and life carries the movement of consciousness on from point to point until one gets a conception of the trend of it. To the less intricate mind of simple cultures, this play-consciousness remains, and the deed justifies itself in simply being done. The dead city of Angkor, consisting of lovely monu-

mental and empty façades, was never built, we are told, for occupation—it was built “to the glory of God.” It may be for a similar reason that the noble mediaeval architecture of Asia is allowed to fall into decay: it was the fruit of impulse, which, building monuments to its great, to its dead, to its gods, was chiefly satisfying itself, and had little interest beyond the element of worship (free, like play, from direct purposefulness) involved in the constructing.

The immediate worth of living—not often singled out for celebration—is thus a fact which we must put at the base of all reflection on this subject. It may be rather the subconsciousness of our symposium than any explicit voice: yet it is pervasively present. This premised, most people of what we call a modern state tend to find the meaning of life in some more explicit value. To many, it lies in something done, achieved, accomplished.

## II

### WORTH IN DOING AND IN THINGS DONE

A MAN is likely to identify the meaning of his life with his work. An architect, studying at Beaux Arts, decided that he had but one religion—to understand architecture and to practice it. There was no end to architecture's immensity and depth, there was enough of it to dignify a life.

This has been the experience of many persons entering an occupation which has a tradition into which a million human heads have set each one an idea, until the whole exceeds the capacity of any head. Such a tradition is itself a world of meanings, which one must labor to possess any part of. To perceive meaning is to participate in it: to embody it in work is to possess meaning. The ratio of intake to outgo is not important.

Now work on specific jobs seems at first to locate its meaning in the task to be finished. The operations leading to that end are so

much irksome delay and price-paying imposed by the "reluctance of nature." In point of actual experience, this vestibule of travail is all along attended by the awareness in imagination of the object to be gained, and hence the steps up the mountain are not merely so many steps, but so many ingredients of the total satisfaction. Work, imaginatively pursued, becomes, as it were, the higher (and prolonged) immediacy of the final objective. Hence work, which seems the reverse of immediacy, tends to resolve itself into an immediacy of more intricate structure.

The more exertion is called out by intensity of opposition—as in battle, or in adventure—the more the experience partakes of the direct tang of being, and justifies itself, at least in retrospect, wholly apart from the end achieved. One who had been in the brief battle of Manila said, "I have lived for at least three minutes." It is the rising of faculty—all faculty—to its height of power in apprehending what is there in the world, what men are, and obstacles; and what wit, strength and speed can do to meet the swift change of the scene. In its dramatic extreme of demand, work becomes once more of the quality of

play. It is not important what is done, nor what is thought: what is important is how much being is concentrated in that moment. Herbert Allen has somewhere remarked about the concentration of war: "you think none of those fancied thoughts about God, home, hereafter; you are too busy": but you live, and the magnet of meaning turns ever after back to that experience as its best example. We require for peace something more than a moral equivalent of war: we need an intensity-equivalent of combat. The development of sportsmanship out of play tends toward an artificial cult of "thrills"—exploration, mountain climbing, big-game hunting, various types of adventure-seeking—as a tribute to the sort of immediate meaning which is normally incident to intense action in "work."

### III

## WORTH IN LOVE AND APPRECIATION

IF ACHIEVEMENT were the sole source of the meaning of life, those who for any reason are deprived of achievement would find their lives *ipso facto* meaningless. Yet there are those who do little work, and who find a sufficiency of meaning for life in the experience of loving and being loved. So long as one has a friend, one can endure to be, though nothing is accomplished beyond the maintenance of that strange mutuality and indirection of consciousness.

It is hard to say what one being adds to the being of another. It is not the simple reflection of one's own mental face, which one might willingly not see even through friendly eyes. It is partly that one can authoritatively confer a sense of worth by loving the other, and what confers this sense cannot be worthless. The existence of a quality in the beloved



is not complete in merely existing; it is fulfilled only as it is discovered, admired, proclaimed. The mind which thus perceives and announces beauty seems to fulfil its own being, and also that of the other.

Love makes no absolute insistence that the excellence of the beloved is superior to that of others—it is not interested in comparisons. What it perceives is that the living human being is marvelous. You have shown me the intrinsic loveliness and wonder of life, of body, of hand, of eye, of carriage, of the common operations of thinking, looking, speaking. Love is an admission into the miraculous quality of the commonplace. In thus comprehending the hidden springs of worth in living, the lover first feels in his own life a dignity he had not suspected, and cannot repudiate. What further meaning does he need than this?

The poets are likely to make much of the adequacy of love as a justification for the pain of being. "Love wakes men, once a lifetime each," says Coventry Patmore, and he assumes that it is awakening they need, not any special stuff of experience.

Love wakes men, once a lifetime each,  
They lift their heavy lids and look,  
And lo, what one bright page can teach,  
They read with joy, then close the book.

And some give thanks, and some blaspheme,  
And some forget, but either way,  
That, and the child's unheeded dream,  
Are all the light of all their day.

But there is a mystery about love, which is seen, in part, in its evanescence. Why is the book shut? And why, if one has known the secret, should that glory and aura of loving be so irrecoverable? Can love be understood?

In analysis, love appears as a perception of qualities, such as can be singly held out for appreciation. Every perceiver of worth is, so far, a Platonic lover. And one will agree that in so far as worth is actually present and being enjoyed, life is in possession of meaning. The amateur in art or science is the nobler epicurean, who through initiation has attained to the joys and sorrows of the connoisseur. If he is faithful to his love, he will say that it is better to have the true and jealous taste, with its attendant suffering, than to be satisfied

with vulgarity. Is the meaning of personal love to be stabilized by being refracted into a prism of appreciations? And are these appreciations the essential meaning of life?

It is largely this belief which explains the drift of mankind into whatever offers itself as "higher education." It is the transfigured Platonism of modernity. I ask a woman student why she holds this insatiate desire to be educated, and she replies that she wishes to be made sensitive to values, those that have reality; this, she thinks, is what life means; she requires depth in experience, rather than frequency or intensity, to the extent of her capacity for depth. And her friend, the poet, puts his hoped-for meaning of life in similar language—there are, he says, "certain experience of mankind he does not want to miss." One recalls that Dewey somewhere defines the good in terms of the "multiplication of satisfactions." This perception of the student, that appreciations differ in depth and reality, and that there are certain ones of racial purport which no one ought to "miss," is a kindred analysis of the generalized art of love.

Granting this analysis a sort of collateral significance, it remains true that it has lost the

peculiar poignancy of personal love in a plurality of aesthetic enjoyments—for love of a person never yields its reason in terms of qualities intrinsically admirable. The person is more than these qualities, and also less.

For the beloved being is less a spectrum of embodied perfections than a reaching-out to an unrealized self. The lover loves the beloved's yearning, and his love may be itself a sympathetically awakened aspiration, anxiety, nostalgia. Thus love is a sharing not of possessions but of longings. It is the presence of "soul" to "soul"—the soul being that phase of our being which dreams of the beyond, and lives in what is not at hand. It is an impulse toward comradeship in an endless pilgrimage, now at its beginning. Love raises no doubt as to the sincerity of this aspiration in which it bathes and within which it opens its own wings—a sincerity which will pay the hard price of eternal, self-immolating pursuit.

Yet it lies in the nature of human love to find in this agreement to aspire an immediate good, an attitude having its own intrinsic grace—so sufficient that all that is not present, the objects of aspiration, may be put out of

mind. To this extent, love is perpetually tempted to insincerity: it pretends to itself that in having the one who longs, it has all that is longed for. Then when one clasps the beloved, one clasps not the longing searcher, but the present human fact. The immediate union of infinite longing with infinite longing has meant the disappearance of both longings in a spurious attainment: and love, as they say, comes to earth. The stability of love requires a stability of relation to some concrete object beyond the personal context; it is this perception which leads us to look beyond the word "love," whether personal or appreciative, for the substance of meaning.

## IV

### WORTH IN SERVING CAUSES: A UNION OF LOVE AND POWER

THE poet who said that life meant for him some experiences he did not want to miss, added a second objective of familiar sound, "to make the world a little better." This commonplace formula, which may be as far from being negligible as it is from being original, unites the interest in achievement with a form of love, the spirit of universal good will. It is perhaps the most widely celebrated of the meanings of life in a time in which the "welfare of society" or of humanity seems the growing fund from which value flows back on all individual participants.

It is an account of meaning which enables one to project himself beyond himself, and so escape the narrowness of self-interest. It is altruism, but of large dimensions, as of one who perceives some great thing moving in the world, and whose joy is in taking part—if not with assurance, at least with the hope of "contributing."

This source of worth may sink to the amiable banality of the feebly Christianized multitude, who drift into a sentimental sense of worthiness on the current of reputable benevolence. As such it is fit to be spewed from the mouth of a Nietzsche—or of a John of Patmos. But it is also capable of sublime heights, and may become the absorbing passion of a stern and noble life.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell found the meaning of his life in a task in Labrador. He had medical training, and might have reflected, as did our architect, that the study and practice of his profession was his religion. But he looked for something else to do with his power in hand, and was deflected toward an undertaking on the outskirts of anything one might call "progress." The man who may have been responsible for this shift would have described his own ambition as the "saving of individual souls": it was Dwight L. Moody. But for Grenfell this motive was transformed by a strong community sense. What he has been doing in Labrador is to take a group of people dropping off the edge of the human world—exploited, cheated, diseased, devoid of schools and hospitals, slipping out—and put them back into the world-community. It has

been a piece of group-surgery: the circulation has been restored. The native groups have faded out of the scene, too far gone: the Saxon stock has got its life back.

Grenfell has less to say than we have said of the ultimate motives of his action. He is not interested in "progress" in the usual sense. He finds, we judge, an immediate satisfaction—assuming the lives of Labradorians worth while—in wreaking his love for "man" on *them*, and seeing them get more life. There is an element of the irrational in it: one chooses this place among many, among these men, arbitrarily, and finds satisfaction in doing for them.

But what is achieved when such Labradorians are rehabilitated? Is the result a circle, after all? Lovers of life take satisfaction in creating more lovers of life. But on these terms, they have not established their own right to a meaning unless each newly established self becomes in turn a creator of further life-lovers; and so the series hangs in suspense for its worth until it shows the quality of endless transmission. This endless fertility, Grenfell and all like him take for granted on the basis of direct intuition, and do not wait for sub-



sequent facts. Their meaning is an immediacy of the second order. The philanthropic action becomes its own excuse for being, as if, in the Kantian phrase, the good-will is good in itself regardless of results. Or, not quite so subjectively,—the good-will, producing results, is good in itself without regard to the ultimate history of Labrador. That future is, so to speak, God's responsibility; the word "God" here signifies the factual realization of the intrinsic value of the relationship set up, and of the law whereby it tends to reproduce itself.

It is plain, then, that buried in the satisfactions, valid and profound, of such creative good-will as that of Grenfell, there are assumptions about destiny and the frame of things which need a further voice. Altruism, even on the noblest social level, is not a sufficient answer.

## V

### WORTH IN FULFILLING A DESTINY

MANY people have a feeling, perhaps a superstition, that they have a specific function to fulfill, which has been assigned to them in the deeper councils of the world. They do not know what that function is. But they are in search of it, kept from a sense of meaninglessness by a conviction that it exists.

It is a version of this view that life has meaning so long as one keeps on growing, that is, continues the progressive realization of capacities assumed innate. But it is something more than this, and less subjective-germ-ripening, when one feels that he is in the hands of an over-necessity which in the course of his world-line he could not evade except at the cost of complete futility. The sense of power is to such persons a sense of obligation, and the quest not of inner dimensionality, but of *specific agenda*, as of the thing or things one was meant to do. This sense, I say, may be a superstition. It may mislead into a search for

“hints,” “indications,” “guidance.” It does confer an ennobling sense of appointment and of inward relation to the ultimate purpose of things.

Let us designate such persons as the mystics. They are led on by something they know not what. They are at a disadvantage in giving an account of it. They may call it a Grail, or a Beatific Vision, to be sought for not in something apart from the world but in the strands of personal activity. The *agendum* is like the military officer’s “mission”; but unlike the officer, the mystic has to find and decipher his own secret instructions. These strange souls demand that human action shall bear a stamp of cosmic appointment, and if they do not perceive that stamp in the actual present task, they are willing to continue its lead through a long pilgrimage, persistently expecting the day of recognition: “This is the thing for which I was born.”

If this presupposition were valid, it would evidently confer adequate meaning upon the life that is working on its hypothesis. One who is traveling to Mecca to perform the *Hajj* is not an ordinary traveler. His destination is present to guide him all the way; at each mo-

ment his place is, not merely a given latitude and longitude, but a certain distance from Mecca. The possible infinitude of meaning is thus conserved for the day's motions by this continuous reference to the awaited discovery. Thus once more meaning enters life not as a goal merely, but as an immediacy—the highest. The program of the mystic, be it what it may, is a ritual, and the divine is in it: whatever its labor and strain, it is the dance of Bali, the quality of eternal play absorbs its motion and its suffering.

But is it true? Or is it a pleasing myth, the conceit of spirits repelled by the accidental incidence of accessible meaning, and resolved to extract a more abiding worth at whatever cost from a silent universe?

## VI

### THE PARADOXES OF MEANING

A SYMPOSIUM reaches no conclusion. But it may reveal, as running through the various guesses, certain principles which may guide our judgment. It may at the least indicate where the meaning of life is not to be found. Let me attempt to summarize a few such indications.

i. There can be no meaning in life unless there is an immediate meaning.

Meaning cannot lie in postponed satisfaction in some future attainment. However we try to refer meaning to an "end" or "goal," it is the nature of experience to lure it back and weave it in with the quality of the ongoing present.

ii. There can be no sufficient meaning of life in immediacy alone.

Meaning is not a taste, nor any sort of purely animal sensitivity; for a human being can take no self-enjoyment in a sub-human form of consciousness. And the human form

is actively referring its present to some sort of a beyond which the taster fails to get.

iii. Three sorts of thing put an end to meaning; and when they are applied to the whole of life, they infect the whole of life with meaninglessness. They are:

Death: a termination of consciousness in the unconscious.

Endless sameness, whether in the form of mere prolongation of an unchanging existence, or of repetition, or of that type of expansion which is sometimes mistaken for growth, and which consists only of more and more of the same. This amounts to a form of death, for when life becomes aware of sameness it tends to become anaesthetic toward it. Cycles of life which should lead back to the beginning (as in Nietzsche's *Ewige Wiederkehr*) would be devoid of total meaning; and so also would a spiral progress which should hover forever over the same point.

Endless deviation: the perpetual abandonment of positions reached. The adoration of novelty destroys meaning as completely as the adoration of eternal changelessness.

iv. Two sorts of thing put an end to hope:

The end that can never be reached, or that is reached only at infinity.

The end that is reachable, so that after reaching it there is nothing more to seek.

These principles, far as they are from hinting the meaning of life, do something to clarify the sort of problem to be solved. If there is such a meaning, it must unite stability with change; reachableness with eternal elusiveness; immediacy with thought-filled purpose; the care-free enjoyment of the child at play with the anxious concern of the groping self in the service of an undeciphered destiny.





## *MEANINGS OF LIFE*



## I

### THOUGHT AND SANITY

**I**T IS fortunate that neither animals nor men need a theory of the meaning of life in order to begin living. The ordinary processes of living, if they can hardly be said from the first to assert their own value, at least raise no skeptical questions about it. The unreflective, unquestioning assurance that one's existence and doings are worth while is roughly what we mean by sanity. Such sanity, little as it may please the rational animal to observe the fact, is not maintained any more than it is begotten by skill in the arts of reasoning: the meaning of life appears most secure when we are not thinking about it. Nor is this merely an oblique way of saying that we are only driven to think about that meaning when something renders us insecure; for the person who has lost conviction that his life has a meaning can hardly be restored to sanity by reason alone.

We partly understand, then, why it is that

when, as today, there is widespread loss of assurance about the meaning of human life, it is not the professional philosopher who is most likely to be drawn into consultation, nor yet the clergyman. It is more likely to be the psychiatrist. In his practise, Dr. C. G. Jung finds this question: What is the meaning of life, or of *my* life, "the most ordinary and frequent of questions." What is the reason for this preference? Assuming the broad distinction that science deals with facts and religion with the meaning or value of facts, it would be natural for this question to be referred to the religious authority; but according to Dr. Jung mental sufferers are less likely to turn in this direction, because "they know too well what the clergyman will say." And as for consulting the philosopher, "they smile at the very thought of the philosopher's answer."<sup>1</sup>

What is it that the clergyman is expected to say, and why is it considered useless?

This matter of the meaning of life has been considered important enough to be set into the catechism, under the caption, "What is the chief end of man?" and the answer is, I believe, "To glorify God and enjoy him for-

<sup>1</sup> Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 267.

ever." Our ancestors would have been surprised to learn that we find any difficulty in these words; some of our contemporaries are equally amazed that our ancestors found them clear. What is it, they ask, to glorify God; and how can it be the chief aim of one being to glorify another? The meaning of human life ought to be stated, they judge, in terms of human interests; otherwise known and accessible values are made subordinate to unknown and inaccessible values,—unreasonable, humiliating, obscure!

Perhaps we feign a little more mystification in regard to this formula than we actually suffer. There is in it a certain evident magnificence connecting the human creature straightway with the ultimate center of things; and there is a promise of eternal and sublime absorption in a good which, however elusive to present grasp, is presumably valid, permanent and final. We know persons who, taking this view of themselves, have achieved not humiliation, but dignity and peace, and—as if the main objective had been provided for—have kept into old age the savor of existence and unflagging interest in people and events. This is pertinent to our question, but it hardly

helps us, if the terms of the faith have gone beyond our reach. We can say almost as much for the fighting Moslem of old who had his myth of impending Paradise which gave him a sense of glory in the very shafts that plowed him down. Suppose there is no Paradise, no consciousness, no more of that man at all; he has at least, to the very end, felt his life worth living, and this may serve as a psychological recommendation of the myth! But like all the psychologists' prescriptions, the psychologist cannot take it—for he cannot immerse himself in the myth—and we are all psychologists to-day.

We are inclined to think that there is something of great value in the theological view, if we could get at it; but for the present we set the formula aside as a problem rather than as an answer, accepting Dr. Jung's verdict that the theologian could help the present generation more if he could translate his ideas into contemporary language.

The philosopher, however, whose business it is to keep his speech close to the literalities of the scientific temper—why should he be a helpless adviser?

Partly, I presume, because he is disposed to large generalities, whereas this question as it affects any person is terribly concrete and near. The philosopher may set up an ethical definition of absolute good, and find the worth of human life measured by the degree in which it embodies or conforms to that end. Or he may, with Hegel, portray the march of Reason in the world and urge men to participate in this universal movement of the Idea. What *he* says is also pertinent. Yet his majestic ideology tends to ride over and beyond the acutely individual pass in which the problem takes human shape, and to reverse its perspective: it is as if to the philosopher nothing were important except the general truth, whereas to the human person nothing were important except the particular.

Partly also because the very attitude of rational inspection and analysis cuts across the momentum of the vital stream in which meaning naturally floats. Meaning, like appetite, *vient en mangeant*. There is much in the pragmatic advice: act first, seek your justifying flavor afterwards.

But is there not some absurdity in proposing action as an answer to the question of life's

meaning, when action of itself makes no statements? The pragmatic prescription may be good in special cases, especially for beginners. But if one has acted, and the salt of action has lost its savor, it will not be salted by more activity! If the present age is suffering, as no previous age has suffered, from the disease of meaninglessness, it is certainly not due to a deficiency of action! And while an attitude of reflection, which interrupts action for a moment, has to suffer from its own imperfect embodiment of life, it is but preparing for better action; for action always employs *some* thought. It is not a choice between thought and action; but between action guided by a worse thought and action guided by a better thought. Hence it is impossible that reflection, in its own nature, can be an enemy to meaning.

It is more likely that the malady of meaninglessness is a disease of growth than a disease of thought; and the fact that it is a malady of which only civilized and reflective man is capable is at least semi-creditable to the sufferer.

Primitive man is wholly free from it. Re-



version to primitivism is one of the avenues in which modern man has sought relief, on the theory that primitive man must somehow be possessed of the secret. Norman Hall, tired of the mess of war, locates himself in Tahiti as Gauguin and others had done before. But they cannot divest themselves of their reflectiveness; and neither Tahiti nor any other primitive spot has an answer; for how can one possess an answer to a question one has never raised?

The same difficulty is met if we try the kindred cure proposed by Bergson—appeal to intuition as against the intellect. The intellect is always raising problems, says Bergson, which only intuition can answer, though it would never occur to intuition to ask them. But in this case, intuition can neither comprehend the question nor answer it. The point is, that once a doubt has been raised about the worth of living, a critical point of moral evolution has been reached; and there can be no going back into an unquestioning innocence, and no answer except in the terms of the question itself. Hence philosophy is involved, because the asking and answering of this question *is* philosophy.

And whether or not philosophers are consulted, philosophy cannot evade the question. For philosophy is committed to the view that the universe has a meaning—which it is out to find; and that human life, by inclusion, has a meaning also. If its answers have been husks, that is due not to the nature of reason but to bad reasoning.

The alternatives are but two.

Either there is no answer to the question of the worth of life: Then primitive man, the fool of nature, nose-led by his instinctive drives, which he feels to be full of meaning, is happier solely because he is unsuspecting of Nature's ruse. And we, having become self-conscious, are fated to bear the penalty of disillusionment.

Or else there is an answer: Then primitive man becomes instructive to us in a different way—no longer as an impossible ideal, nor as harboring a profound secret, but as using in his naïve attitudes valid intuitions whose meaning reflection, rendered sadder and honest by its failures, may recognize and interpret in intellectual terms, not without bearing on contemporary problems.

The first alternative—that life has for thoughtful men no total meaning—cannot be dismissed with a word. There is a wisdom in pessimism and in this kindred judgment of the worth-void (like that physical vacuum in which the universe was once supposed to float) : it is the wisdom of a wider survey.

In its biological frame, life appears as a set of instinct-activities, the conclusion of one the beginning of the next, forming a life-cycle. But a cycle implies that the terminus of one life is the beginning of another: hence a succession of life-cycles which are the same forever. From the scientific point of view, this mode of conceiving things is a triumph; for science is the discernment of series in the confused changes of the world. But series involve repetition, and repetition the banishment of meaning. Hence our theoretical triumph begets a new and better-grounded pessimism, not the pessimism of complaint, but the pessimism of emptiness.

This result will be much before us during our argument. It seems clear, however, that there can be no such thing as a demonstration of the meaninglessness of life; one can only report that one has not so far found a mean-

ing, and it is always possible that the fault is in the direction of one's search—one has been trying to draw water from empty wells.

The second alternative I take to be the true one: there is a meaning; primitive intuition grasps it dimly; it is capable of rational expression, with an increase of force, not a loss of it. We shall try to find such an expression.

When philosophy in search of "substance" betakes itself to "animal faith," it is celebrating its most signal failure. When in search of meaning it betakes itself to "animal drives" it parades its shame as if it were an accomplishment. Reversion to simplicity and vitality we must have; but not as a new version of the ancient irrationalism, a new divorce such as Bergson proposes between vitality and intelligence. What we require is the opposite of this—a remarriage between vitality and intelligence, which have been living too much apart in attempted independence and mutual criticism.

With this conviction, I shall invite you to consider certain logical discriminations which I find useful in dealing with the notion of meaning.

## II

### LOGICAL PRELIMINARIES

WE CANNOT get far in our enquiry here (and this is true of a good deal of contemporary philosophy) without some general notions about "meaning."

Meaning is not a single sort of thing: it is at least two-fold, that is, we have to look for it in at least two directions. The meaning of a generality has to be looked for in the particulars which it covers. The meaning of a particular has commonly to be looked for in a generality.

If, for example, we are asked the meaning of the very general term "beauty," there is little satisfaction in trying to define it in terms of other general ideas, such as "value." But we get some light on it when we are told that it means a quality such as one finds in this and this and this beautiful thing. The general means these particulars. On the other hand, if we are asked the meaning of a particular, we shall frequently find that it has a meaning

because it exemplifies some general rule or class. This red spot on the skin means nothing to you and me; to the physician's eye it means scarlet fever. This bird's flight is an instance of migration; it means the approach of summer. The position of this star on the photographic plate is a mere fact to the lay eye: to the astro-physicist it means corroboration of a theory that light is deflected by gravity. And as a rule, the power of an intellect can be roughly measured by the amount of general significance which a given particular may carry.

It is clear that a theory which lights on the first of these two directions of meaning—whereby the general means the particular, as logical positivism inclines to do—and calls this the meaning of meaning, is dealing with a half-truth as if it were the whole. A satisfactory theory must recognize both directions of meaning, and show how they are connected; failing to do this, it merely spins on its heels among old dilemmas.

This is one instance of a general principle in philosophy which I shall call *the principle of duality* (in analogy with the correspondence principle in projective geometry).

We shall not try here to make a formal principle of it, but merely use it as a guide to judgment, suggesting that certain relations between ultimate categories can be read in either direction with equal validity.

Thus, in regard to the meaning of life—which is here not a definitional meaning but a value-meaning. In one direction, life finds its meaning in spots of valuable experience, particular goods—pleasures, successes, and the like. This is the most palpable meaning of life. Each particular good suffuses the path that leads up to it with meaning. If I am a hunter, the meaning of what I am now doing is the kill at the end of the hunt, or the feast beyond the kill, or the pride and glory in my prowess which may last well beyond the feast. Thus, the bundle of one's particular hopes provides meanings for the total complex of all those activities that lead toward them, even if they never arrive. But true meaning is found in the moments that do arrive, in spots of enjoyed experience; and all other meanings are subsidiary and derivative.

On the other hand, one may reasonably enquire further, what do these spotwise enjoyments mean, singly or in sum? This is the

baffling question, and at first sight somewhat perverse: for if labor, pain, delay, all mean the enjoyment in which they hope to terminate, why then turn on this enjoyment and suggest that it mean something else? Enjoyments mean themselves and that is the end of it. There is a logical twist in asking for the meaning of "life as a whole": life contains meanings—it does not have a meaning of its own! Yet it is precisely this which the enquiry for the meaning of life usually has in mind. And it looks for its answer, not toward more of these spots, but in the opposite direction, toward some relation of individual human life to a larger totality.

In the one direction, meaning ascends from the parts to the whole: life has meaning if it contains a goodly number of these satisfactory spots—their worth colors the frame in which they are set. In the other direction, meaning descends from the whole to the parts: human life has a meaning if (and only if) there is a total meaning in the world in which it can participate.

There is a traditional hostility between these two views; men have been called upon to choose between them. Pleasure, for ex-



ample, has been under common condemnation in philosophy, chiefly because it is a spot-wise good, and therefore ephemeral: all genuine meaning, it has been said, derives from the whole—be it the evolution of the race, or the realization of ideals, or the purposes of God. But the empirically-minded man calls attention very justly to the vagueness of these totalities; and further to one striking phenomenon—the apparent evanescence of meaning as one passes from smaller to larger totalities in one's own life. It is easy to tell the meaning of what one is doing today in terms of what one expects tomorrow: but the meaning of this year's activities in terms of the longer purposes of life is more difficult to say! And if one persists in asking what the meaning of these longer plans may be in the total purpose of life—one gasps for an answer. The bride-to-be works on her trousseau because she plans to marry; if you ask her why she marries, she may think you a fool, but may deign to reply that she hopes to have a family and care for them. If you then further ask why she plans to have a family and care for them, she is probably annoyed, chiefly because she has nothing to say. The larger mean-

ings are evanescent. The verifiable source of meaning is the particular.

Now the principle of duality requires that both modes of meaning be true. Pleasure is important. I am prepared to say, as against the philosophic tradition, that pleasure is a necessary condition of the meaning of life. There is a soundness in the common unreflective sense according to which life means the next meal, the next struggle, the next success, and in retrospect, the algebraic sum of all such spots, with a tendency to forget or minimize the negative values. The fisherman has no problem of the meaning of life so long as he is intent on what may happen the next minute. And it is no derogation of this attitude to say that it is the animal attitude: the animal meaning is a part of the meaning of life.

Only, it is not the whole; and the rest of it is not in the same direction! That is the source of the difficulty. The meaning which lies in particular goods provides a plain and obvious theory! All the utilitarians and pragmatists can come to nest in its ample branches. It excludes the other view, not by refuting it, but by displacing it. Nevertheless, it is also

true that meaning descends from the whole to the parts.

And the disease of meaninglessness which infects our time is due, I believe, chiefly to the fact that, since this second aspect of meaning has not been attended to, human life has been set, through the normal advances of the sciences, into a series of total frames which are essentially meaningless—for it is not the business of science to deal with meanings—and this inadvertency of the age has eaten away the foundations of its structure of meanings. A meaningless whole implies a meaningless part.

We have set human life into an astronomical picture, which by definition contains no meaning. We have psychologized ourselves as things of physical nature—therefore meaningless. We have biologized ourselves as products of natural drives, which result in life-cycles—likewise meaningless. We have sociologized ourselves into a humanism of mutual aid, in arriving at biological ends, for which psychology can give us the behavior-pattern, which is part of the astronomical scene, which is meaningless. All this is the result of our most exalted intellectual achievement, our scien-

tific reason, accepted as the datum of philosophy.

We are in the position of the patient who arrived near midnight at the door of the Berlin Psychopathic Institute, and having awakened the staff, demanded admission on the ground that he was out of his mind: "*Ich bin verrückt*," he said. This was irregular, for patients out of their minds are not supposed to admit it, and hence the rules required certificates of physicians. But since this patient was confessing his deficiency, the authorities in that emergency saw no reason why the routine should be insisted on: he was admitted, and the subsequent examination showed that his diagnosis of his own condition was correct. But the matter became an embarrassing legal issue, turning on the point that since he had made a true diagnosis, he must, in this capacity, have been sane at the moment of admission. The court could deal with the sane and also with the insane; but not with an individual who was both at the same time. Yet this seems to be our own plight, for in the perfection of our sanity, we have soberly adjudged ourselves as a race de-

void of meaning. No wonder we patronize the psychoanalysts.

It may be well to look at this situation somewhat more closely, and then enquire whether there are omitted elements in that total scene.

### III

## SCIENCE AND IMAGINATION

SCIENCE is not in general responsible for the use which men make of its results, whether these users are technicians or thinkers. Science is concerned with facts, not with the value-meaning of these facts. As a body of truth, science stands as one great and indubitable moral achievement of our time. If men misinterpret it, that is their responsibility, not the scientist's.

There is, however, one science of which this cannot be said with the same freedom, namely, psychology. The human mind is a pursuer of meanings and values; a science of the mind becomes, therefore, an inquiry into the entertainment of meaning. And the trend of this science has encouraged the public, and college administrations in America and Germany, to believe that it has light to throw on this theme.

It is therefore obligatory upon us to note that in proportion as psychology succeeds in

its ambition to become a natural science, just in that proportion it becomes empty-handed in respect to meanings.<sup>1</sup> For the ideal of psychology as a natural science is to reduce the phenomena of the mind to patterns of behavior, which are in the last analysis events in the general history of energy. The entity called "consciousness" may be there, but it is not to intrude into the picture as an explanatory factor. Nothing that happens happens because of consciousness and its desires; it happens because the pertinent law of brain-physiology requires this outcome. And since "law" is not aware of what it does, and since all meaning is meaning *for consciousness*, meaning is eliminated from the scientific picture. Thus a natural-science psychology is, by necessity of its method, a description of the meaningful in terms of the meaningless.

Now the methods and working assumptions of psychology are just as legitimate as those of any other science. They are to some extent forced upon it by the nature of its attempt to

<sup>1</sup>In practice, the science of psychology is pulled in two directions; toward naturalism, perhaps in the form of behaviorism, which is one clear ideal, and toward a purposive description with introspective data. I am here speaking of the pure instances of the first trend.

observe and measure the mind, which is neither directly observable by an outsider nor measurable. It is driven to substitute for the mind the brain, or the organism in its relations to its environment—which *can be* observed and measured. For many purposes these substitutions are valid; and an important body of truth arises from them. It is perhaps too much to expect the psychologist as a human being to remind his public at every turn (or his students, or himself) that his results, as a picture of the human mind, have just one grave defect, adopted with the working hypotheses, namely, that they have no *meaning* at all! But since meaning is our present interest, we have to insist, somewhat ungraciously, on this circumstance. A naturalistic psychology, once taken as the truth about human nature, would become a guide to national mental and moral bankruptcy, not to social control.

The value of the psychologist's results is that they explain our errors—why we *mis*-behave. Their defect is that they can never explain why we go right. For the criminal or the neurotic patient, it is a vast comfort to learn that what he has done is the result of



certain mechanisms, and can be dealt with, like any other fact of nature, medically. He resorts to the psychoanalyst in preference to the moral philosopher or the priest, largely because he prefers to regard his deviations as natural phenomena, rather than as products of his will. But for the *restoration* of either the neurotic or the criminal, he must be brought back, somehow, into the world of meanings, in which his behavior is subject to standards. Otherwise he is worse off than he was before—as many are—because he has been reduced in his own eyes to an automaton, whose whole existence is devoid of sense.

As applied psychology comes to a clear consciousness of its position, it recognizes this fact. Clearheaded and candid psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, like Dr. Jung, or recently Dr. Link in our own country, feel bound to announce it, much to the distress of some of their fellow-practitioners. Jung remarks that all of his patients above thirty-five—and that means most of them—are suffering, at bottom, from this one cause: Their life has no meaning to them. (He also says that they are all educated people; he does not put these remarks together, but they belong together.)

And then he adds that as a psychotherapist he does not know what to tell them, nor does any psychotherapist as such! They have come to him because they have heard of the "sub-conscious" which, as a mysterious realm secure from the deadening analyses of our sophisticated minds, may have healing in it as well as disease. "It must be a relief to every serious minded person," says honest Dr. Jung, "to hear that the psychotherapist also does not know what to say."<sup>2</sup>

But Dr. Jung knows the *sort of thing* that is needed. The patient must acquire a meaning for his life. And if the psychoanalyst does not know the true meaning, and if the patients for the most part get nothing from religion, the best the physician can do is to bring imagination into play. Hence Jung talks about the "healing fiction"—for after all, an imagined meaning is still a meaning; he finds that the methods of Freud and Adler are deficient because they ascribe "too little value to the fictional and imaginative processes."

Now it is of great interest to note that Pro-

<sup>2</sup> Jung, C. G., *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, p. 267.

fessor John Dewey comes to essentially the same conclusion, namely, that the meaning of life is not to be reached through the sciences, but rather by way of the imagination—a conclusion which seems to me in various ways a welcome departure from positions with which he has been supposedly identified.

The genius of the instrumental philosophy I take to be this: that ideas mean what they lead us to—the general idea serves as an instrument to guide action to some particular experience in which it is verified. The general means the particular. But in the great little book of Dewey's on *A Common Faith*, meaning runs the other way; particular experiences appear as *instrumental to ideas*. The meaning of life is found in serving ideal ends, that is to say, in attempting to embody them in practice. To find one's life integrated, that is to say, whole-hearted and therefore significant, one must reach the point, says Dewey, where certain ideals present to imagination dominate conduct. Let us look somewhat closely at the reasoning which leads to this conclusion. Its course, as I read it, is as follows:

Ideal ends are suggested by experience—

largely by the imperfections of experience which strike out in our minds notions of something better. In this form the ideals do not dominate; they are scattered, occasional, various, they must first be brought into a unity by imagination. They must also be conceived as possible of realization in the universe (which, as Dewey holds, is itself an imagined, not a given totality). Then this projected picture must be regarded as having intrinsic authority over our allegiance. Only in this way can our personal selves be integrated; for the self, also, is not a unity given in experience—the only unity it can possibly have or get is a unity of aim—and it cannot by dead resolve unify itself. There must be some object so intrinsically good that one is, as it were, drawn by it into a “surrender”: one is vanquished by the inherent claim of an ideal value. The ordinary, empirical self is not in fact integrated, and in this situation has no total meaning: its unity must come to it from outside, as “an influx from sources beyond purpose.” It has, in short, to be unified *by an obligation*; that is, by a conviction “that some end should be supreme over conduct.”

This surrender has something of the nature of an act of faith because, while the ideals are not alien to the universe which instigates them in us, there is no guaranty that they are to be successfully actualized: "The outcome is not with us." *The ideal may never have a pragmatic verification*; yet the whole possibility of stable and unified living depends on the human capacity to give one's self whole-heartedly to its service.

Now this notion of a surrender to an ideal claim, and, as Dewey emphasizes, of *stability* through all sorts of vicissitudes because of that single-mindedness (an attitude from which experimentalism seems to have vanished) can only mean that the spotwise values have ceased to be the significant elements in the meaning of life. The part is now to get its meaning from the whole. And that whole is to be presented to us in imagination.

What has brought Dewey to this radically non-instrumental view of things? Nothing but the sterilities inherent in physical naturalism, as the race works out its logic. If the world is indifferent, man is alone with his values; there is nothing for him to do but set

up his habitation, defiantly if you please, but at any rate with that will to make the best of things whose true essence is isolation and despair. "The ties binding man to nature that poets have always celebrated" are not appropriate in such a world, and no "natural piety" could be in order. But if human life is to rest seriously, as Dewey urges, on the connection with the environing world "in the way of both dependence and support," we shall have to pass beyond poetry, fiction, or other modes of imagination to the objective facts of that relationship.

If Dewey declines to take this step into metaphysics, it is no doubt because he would then come into dangerous proximity with supernaturalism, which he rejects even more decisively than physicalism. He therefore proposes to depend, for the meaning of life, on the half-world of the imagination.

One wonders, then, whether Dewey's effort to provide life a meaning, like that of Jung, is not *circular*. One has to be integrated by surrender to an outside value; but the self must first of all, in imagination, constitute that outside value, and lend the incommunicative environing world the character of a universe.

Can human allegiance be compelled by an object which it has done so much to make? Can the needed "surrender" to a God of one's own conscious construction be genuinely executed?

## IV

### THE EXPERIMENT OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

**D**EWEEY and Jung agree on the valid judgment that the world of spotwise satisfactions lends life no total meaning. Both see that the value of the parts must come from the whole, and that the total pictures revealed by our sciences, so far as they build them, have no meaning to offer from their own resources, and that we have no right to expect it.

Both appeal to the ideal-building imagination to supply this deficiency of science. Now ideals may be imaginary constructions; they can be conceived as unified by imagination. But they may also be regarded as having an objective validity of their own. Plato inclined to set these ideals off in an eternal world by themselves, more real than the world about us; contemporary realism has some leanings toward recognizing their independence, if not their priority. But this detached world,



though it does not suffer from being a product of our own fancy, has a similar weakness in its reference to our human affairs. It "subsists" but it does no work. It is just this defect which led to the pragmatic philosophy in the first place, according to which ideals are *not* independent realities to be contemplated, but practical possibilities to be realized. They are not eternal abstractions—there are no possibilities for us except the possibilities we think of. Now when Dewey wants to give them some sort of footing in nature, he is naturally embarrassed. For to regard nature as actually concerned about them would be to turn it into supernature. He therefore leaves their status problematic.

One suspects that Dewey, in accordance with his principles, would like to submit this crucial matter to *experiment*. Fortunately, the experiment has already been performed. It is nothing less than the entire history of Western civilization. One has, of course, to interpret this history. I offer the following unconventional reading of it as a contribution to experimental philosophy.

The history of Europe begins in a period

of despair with regard to the spotwise values of life—just such a view as our present age is reaching. There was a spirit of alienation from the biological and social staples of life, arising from a plenitude of experience, and expressing that experience in a variety of ways. Wise men had always warned the race against making too much of pleasure, because indulgence was likely to bring pain. This warning has never been very impressive to impulsive mankind. Wiser men had issued the same warning on another ground, namely, that indulgence is likely to bring shame, which is a very different consideration. Physical greed, for example, was seen to be incompatible with dignity. One could not become the astute diplomat of Ptah Hotep or the princely man of Confucius without keeping a rein on appetite.

Eventually, with more radical analysis, desire itself is declared the enemy, since it necessarily involves men in suffering. The outlook of Buddhism reflects the widespread judgment of the Orient that the biological lure is deceptive—a nest of false promises, leading only deeper into misery, strengthening thirst in the process of slaking it, fasten-

ing the chains that attach one to existence at the moment one thinks one is breaking them. Civilized men had become suspicious of spot-wise satisfaction, and, since desire remained, set up *weaning disciplines*, to rid themselves of its illusory spell. The Yoga, the practices of Zen, the negative path of the mystics, are all built on this revulsion against the direct pull of natural value.

Now it is noteworthy that while these weaning disciplines in India and the Far East were motivated by a desire to escape from suffering even at the cost of escaping from existence itself, the two great disciplines which turned westward had very different motives. Neither Stoicism nor Christianity were possessed to escape suffering. They were both preoccupied with the *quality of the person*, so much so as to render them relatively anaesthetic to pleasures and pains. The Stoics wanted inner freedom and self-control—that proud human invulnerability was the possession which made life worth living—and to gain it the more stupid desires had to be taught their place. The Christians wanted to escape from sin, in order to be fit for another world, and in order to gain this concrete

good which was imaginatively felt as almost present, they were not alone already half alienated from the things "after which the Gentiles seek," holding this world in contempt, but were often actually avid for suffering—that persecution and martyrdom which their Master had already held out to them as a reward, and called them blessed when they had it!

What we have, then, in both Stoicism and Christianity is an *experiment in detachment* (detachment from all spotwise goods in the interest of some total good involving self-integration), an experiment carried out heroically by numerous individuals, and transmitted in spirit to the formative period of Europe.

How did this experiment in detachment work? It was, on its literal terms, a failure.

It became clear to the European mind that it is impossible for man to reject the biological and social goods and retain a worth in life. This whole period was a sort of nightmare of otherworldliness from which we are only now recovering.

Upon the *fact* of this failure, mankind is now pretty well agreed; the word "other-

worldliness" has become one of the bad words of our vocabulary. When Marx and Bakunin draw up an indictment of religion, it is this that rivets their eye. The weaning is too well done. But we have still to agree on the *cause and the extent of the failure*. Let us look briefly at a phase of history which has never been written, but which is deeper than the history of ideas, namely, the history of feeling—the ruling feeling of schools and epochs.

Stoicism was an aspiration toward unmovedness based on a fear of emotion; it was "imperturbability" based upon a persistent and fundamental perturbation—fear of being perturbed. Stoicism could not last because it was inwardly inconsistent, but also because it was, for each individual, *solitary*—intolerably solitary.

The self-controlled, self-respecting self, proud of its equanimity, free from fear, inflexible in its judgments of value, enjoying instant by instant the rulership of its own "ruling faculty"—this self must also be free from any attachments whose severance could disturb its peace. Life has to go on; but it moves by rule and relationship, not by impulse. But

a life afraid of its own impulses is something less than life, and something less than free.

Hence we find the Stoics—great, reserved, detached, lonely, heroic—breaking out of their inward prisons and seeking an ideal companionship with Destiny, or with Zeus, if not with mortals. “Lead me, O Zeus, and thou, O Destiny!” Stoicism veers on one side toward altruism and on another toward the mysticism which is a flight of the alone to the Alone!

But this was only to win a certain divine or moral support in detachment, not to achieve any genuine reconciliation with this human sphere of accidental fortune and injustice. Stoicism could not attach itself, and as a movement, though not as a mighty influence, it perished.

Christian detachment survived longer—partly, I suspect, because it was inconsistent in another way.

Its altruism was, to be sure, a mutual moral support in otherworldliness; but there was a strange element of *unbalance* in it. One was to give cups of cold water to others while regarding these cups of no worth for one’s self.

The beneficiary had to be willing to receive what the giver acquired merit by renouncing. The Christian refused on principle to fight for his own earthly concerns, but the earthly welfare of others was worth fighting for; and so Christianity, with the aid of the Stoics (though with a pugnacity and persistence which Stoicism never showed) begot a great system of civil rights—surely a strange broodling in a camp of world-forsakers!

When the great ages of detachment were over and Humanism began to speak once more for the value of mundane things, Christianity found itself already *half on the side of revolt*. The scientific spirit of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was in one sense a reversal of an early-Christian contempt for the wisdom of this world, but in another sense it was a child of this same detachment. For what was the empirical attitude toward Nature except a new application of altruism? The scientist must lose his life of *a priori* prejudices in order to save it in the mastery of Nature.

Then what has this experiment in detachment shown? That detachment is fallacious and futile and morbid? This is the usual in-

ference. But it is a shallow inference. Such an inference puts us back into the world of spotwise satisfaction—as if *nothing had been learned*. It is futile to go back to that position of mere positive natural chance-taking with the satisfactions of instinctive nature. The despair out of which this stupendous other-worldliness grew was itself an experimental refutation of the sufficiency of the attached life! And if the enthusiasm of the early period of detachment had shown nothing else, it was something for humanity to discover that the moral concern for the quality of the self may become so absorbing as to eliminate or even to invert the natural attitude toward suffering. The attitude of detachment has entered human life to stay.

But it must stay *in company with the attitude of attachment*. The true result of this Western experiment, as I read it, is that detachment and attachment somehow belong together. For there is no worth in living apart from a whole-hearted interest in action; and no man can act whole-heartedly in a world whose values and reality he must hold in constant suspicion or denial. It is the *principle of duality* that is affirmed by this experiment.



But it also shows something of the way in which these two opposing directions of meaning belong together. For we observe that it is *only the detached self that is capable of effective attachment.*

If we think simply of spotwise enjoyment, it is not the glutton who most savors the food. To enjoy, one has to be free; so that only he can wholly enjoy to whom enjoyment is no necessity! Similarly, only he is fit for any activity, function, trust, or friendship to whom that good is not the absolute and indispensable good. The best liver is like the true sportsman who treats every game as if it were the sole aim of life, and yet, when it is finished, is not made or unmade by success or failure. The detachment must be genuine in order to be successful.

And if it is genuine, it results not alone in a healthy appetite for the spotwise things, but in *fertility*—inventiveness in those goods which characterize civilization. The enthusiasm with which the methods of science were worked out and the laws of nature conceived and verified was a direct consequence of that long prior restraint. And no mentality which has not acquired a similar power of self-forget-

fulness can hope for continued achievement in natural science.

Thus, without intending it, Stoicism and Christianity bred in Europe a race of men capable to a degree unexampled in history of dealing with empirical conditions—capable enjoyers, efficient organizers, able rulers, pertinent and consecutive thinkers, developers of technique, creators of literature and art. It is a blind philosophy of history which supposes that these great traits are products of race, or climate, or economic methods, or reaction against superstition. It was their discipline in detachment which gave them this empirical power!

The psychological conditions of that extraordinary fertility have been the theme of much speculation on the part of historians and philosophers. There can be no insight into it so long as one regards the phenomenon of the Renaissance merely as a humanistic revolt. At least this must be clear: that *detachment had here entered into an auspicious co-operation with attachment*. And our problem is largely what can be meant by *such a normal and genuine detachment* as neither Stoicism nor early Christianity truly defined.

## V

# HOW ATTACHMENT REQUIRES DETACHMENT

### THE CONCEPTION OF GOD

**T**O SAY that there is such a thing as a normal detachment from human goods is either to say that these goods are of relatively little value and our interest in them ought somehow to be mitigated, or else, without detracting from their value, to say that there is a normal indirectness in the pursuit of them.

We are prepared by what has preceded to reject the first alternative, if not to adopt the second. A detachment which depends on the disparagement of "worldly" or "human" values is unsound, just as any pure otherworldliness is unsound. But why, if human values are valuable, should there be any "normal indirectness,"—since an end is, by definition, an object to be aimed at; and there seems to be no virtue in approaching a goal by

retreating from it, or in beating a tack to reach it?

a) *The illusion of local value*

The answer lies in the fact that the several goods we seek are not isolated and circumscribable atoms of value.

They are good, but their goodness is not located purely in themselves, any more than the value of a banknote is located in itself as a tangible paper document. The illusion of local value is like the illusion of local weight: the weight of a body appears to be inherent in it—where else should it be? Yet all of this weight could be destroyed without scratching its surface, if we could but destroy all the surrounding bodies. Now consider a value-quality such as the goodness of food; suppose it to be located in the foodstuffs: then it would be no function of our variable appetites, and no matter how much we may have consumed, the food would still retain its same “goodness.” But since, in fact, this goodness is clearly relative, among other things, to the health, hunger and habits of the organism, we cannot locate the goodness in the foodstuff.

b) *The general principle of relativity in regard to values*

There is, in fact, a general principle of relativity in regard to value. This principle implies two things:

First, that all goodness is goodness for a self. Whence it follows that a lively and sensitive condition of the self is a prerequisite for any enjoyment whatever; and instead of driving head-on to enjoy, it is occasionally necessary to re-sensitize the self which is to do the enjoying.

Second, that any particular good is, and is felt to be, a case of a total right-relation between the enjoyer and his world. (We are most aware of this in the negative instances in which some outlying and apparently irrelevant uneasiness interferences with such robust and well-localized pleasures as food and sleep.) To enjoy "a good" is always a special way of enjoying "the good." Hence conscious attention to this total rightness may be a necessary precondition for appreciating any specific item of goodness.

Thus what we describe as "a normal detachment" is the natural consequence of seeing

more truly than usual what and where goodness is—getting rid of the illusions of its corporeal location and of its independence. A normal detachment is one which looks away from particular goods to the sources from which these goods derive their worth—not to remain with face averted from the “earthly” object, but to return thereto with new zest.

In this very simple statement we have the formal explanation of the universally recognized paradox according to which the direct pursuit of happiness or pleasure proves self-defeating. This self-defeating pursuit is not accurately called a pursuit of pleasure: it is a pursuit of pleasure-in-specific-objects, and it is self-defeating because it falsely locates the value in those objects; it fails to recognize the relativity of what is relative, and the dependency of what depends on something else. There is a lack of objective truth in its definition of its end.

c) *Concrete objectivity*

But what are these “sources of value” to which we must look? Are we being reminded once more of Plato’s “absolute good,” of which all earthly goods are feeble replicas,

and which it is the soul's ambition to contemplate in its purity?

So far as this means that there is a unity in all experiences of goodness, and that it is a condition of health to remind ourselves of this unity, without which we could only be distracted selves, trying to scramble together for our lives a favorable aggregate of disparate satisfactions—Yes! The integration of self depends on the integration of its values.

So far as it means that the world of ideal value in its unity is a world apart and self-sufficient (as the partial values are not) —No! There is no such world—not even for imagination. If our relief from “this world” can only come by contemplating such ideals as we ourselves can grasp and unify, such principles of improvement as we ourselves have conceived, we are back again in the region in which Dewey, Plato, and Dr. Jung are agreed—the region of the ideal as an abstract object.

Such ideal, an invented notion of what might be or ought to be, an instrument in remodelling experience, has a limited power to claim conviction and service, as well as a limited power to restore the jaded and critical appreciation. It cannot sufficiently detach us

from What Is. For What Is, whatever its defects, has shown the vast validity of having come to be: it has reality in its quiver. And further, it is no mere passive receiver of criticism; it criticizes my ideal in turn, and improves it.

It is true that the ideal remains apart from the facts. Every effort to appreciate the facts of experience is saddening, and leads to a return to the ideal as escape and refreshment: art and the perfect realm of number may provide a partial release for "the free man's worship." So too, every effort to embody the ideal is saddening: the ideal stands beyond, with its persistent invitation and demand, holding us subject to it by its own beauty. But it does not stand unchanged! For the effort to embody is also instructive to the ideal itself. The means which we find necessary in order to give our ideas historical effect are never mere "resistances": they contribute to our understanding of what the idea means. The house that is built is less than the house that was dreamed, but it is also much more.

This implies that the ideal is no mere invention of my own, but in part a discovery. It is in the concrete world, that very world



which I am criticizing and detaching myself from. It is there in two senses; first, as partially embodied. This is what Hegel sees: the real element in the flux of history is the rational or ideal part, and the ideal which has shown even the partial merit of coming into existence is a truer ideal than the separate and aloof world of abstract perfection. But beyond this, secondly, the ideal is concretely present as a *tension* in these very things, as if they were at war with themselves, dissatisfied with themselves.

The philosophy of immanence (pantheism, monism, objective idealism, humanism) lights on half of this truth: the absolute is within the world; all things partake of the divine nature. But this philosophy fails to note that the absolute is there also as an ingredient of strain and ferment: the divine nature is at odds with the very particular it inhabits; the essence of the good is dissatisfied with its actual garb and struggles beyond its integument. In criticizing it we are (to some degree) reporting its own self-criticism. In observing a living thing we perceive both what it is and what it aims at, beyond what it is. The ideals we conceive for a thing are

likely to be well-founded when they correspond with a tension and conflict within the thing's own nature.

So far as this is true, both of part-things and of the world as a whole, the human product of ideals ceases to be a mere subjective localism in the universe, supported chiefly by private resolve and sentiment as the free man's courageous but also defiant and desperate worship: it becomes an attempt to decipher the inward driving and straining force, the in-tension of things. The ideals cease to be merely ours; they acquire concrete objectivity. To them, as ideal objects, is thus added a *subject*, a self who entertains them: the world knows what it is doing: the locus of what we call "reality" shifts from the particular facts toward this concrete entity, the process of the world as *an intended labor*. Thus in contemplating "the good" we contemplate "the real" as well. Whether or not this is the "supernaturalism" which Dewey dreads may be a matter of terminology; it is, I believe, what he ought to mean. At any rate, the integration of the self, and therewith the vigor of normal human attachment, can be had on no other terms. Our normal detachment is

first of all our effort to discern this concretely objective "will of the world," the God who is critic and alterer and not alone the conservative substance at the center of the world.

#### THE CONTINUANCE OF LIFE

This problem of a "normal detachment," we have said, requires for its solution first of all the recognition of objective reality in an ideal factor in events. This ideal factor shows itself first in the self-enjoyment by the world of its own actualized goodness as its "real" element. It shows itself also as an objective struggle away from what things are toward what they might be. Because of this objective factor, man is not alone in his grasp and support of "the good."

But the law of detachment has another aspect, of which we shall gain a clearer view if we consider more closely how any particular spot-wise good is related to its context.

#### d) *The law of empirical otherness*

It is a psychological commonplace that we know things in part through what they are not. If every colored thing were green, the epithet "green" would lose all the significance

it now has by being "not red," "not yellow," "not blue." There might still be a theory of color; but this theory would coalesce with the theory of green, and one or other word would be superfluous, except for speculative purposes.

Thus, the context of any experience, its entourage of "others," while in one way competing with it for attention, in another way adds to its meaning. There is such a thing as a distracting and ruinous rivalry among objects of possible attention: there is also a kind of otherness which, affording relief and distance, re-enters into and enhances the meaning of the object. As in Mr. Gilbert Chesterton's experience, one must leave Battersea in order to perceive Battersea. In Battersea, among his trunks, he declares, "I am going to Battersea—by way of Rome, Vienna, Saint Petersburg." After dead mechanism, the chief enemy of meaning is repetition, routine, mere quantitative prolongation. Intelligent living on a limited subject-matter tends to kill its own savor; for its business is to "know its business," that is, to produce a set of classifications which provide for everything; but once these classifications have been successfully set

up, the price of success being the destruction of novelty, the processes of living are reduced to tedium.

Now this possibility of seeing the particular as it is, is also the possibility of conceiving it improved or varied. The mental excursion which through contrast illuminates the essence of the thing brings also the critical imagination, wherein lie the seeds of fertility. For the fulcrum of fertility is that vision of the particular in which all that is accidental about it becomes salient: to see it as a factual specimen which might well be otherwise is the first step in actually devising a deviation, a novelty in the world. Experience of an "other" is one of the conditions of invention, of still further otherness.

Hence we observe that the great ages of invention have often been ages of physical or mental exploration. The noblest products of human thought, civilizations, tend to throw over their members the spell of totality, and, therefore, of necessity: their peculiarities are not felt as peculiar, but under the hypnosis of invariable recurrence, they assume the air of axiomatic and universal validity. To escape from such a fixation, whether by travel or by

trade or even by invasion, is like all liberations profoundly disturbing; but a due succession of such shocks of otherness is a favoring condition for the vitality of any culture, and, one suspects, a necessity. May something similar be true of our mental preoccupation with the more general traits of this one world, with its peculiarities of space, mass, energy, organization?

I believe we have no choice but to generalize our principle. Fertility in novelty is required if any continued experience is to retain such meaning as it has; still more so if it is to achieve such meaning as it is capable of. If this is true, then to every particular there should be an equally actual other. An empty imagination will not do, nor the mere logical category of otherness: the logical principle that to every particular "this" there is a conceivable "other" is only a blank permission to conceive such an other if one can. An actual and concrete "other world" would be the best condition for lively fertility of mind in regard to this one, if it were free from invidious rivalry.

Now imagination is always busy, making use of this logical permission, and presenting

to us sketches, not alone of other languages, other lands, other geometries and algebras, but also of other selves, other lives, other worlds. It fills these logical schemes with imagery whose accidental character it recognizes—making them myths and symbols of what it regards real. It insists on only one literal ingredient of these fancies, namely, that its other world shall be genuinely other (transcendent) to whatever particular we can describe as “this”—the alternative being an eventual failure of fertility, and a value-law of entropy, threatening whatever values we now enjoy with a gradual trend to insalience, that is to say, to nothingness.

e) *Temporal otherness, or beyondness*

What we are tracing is the law that the context of an experience of value may be, and normally is, a contributing factor to its worth, and not a competing or disparaging factor.

This remains true when the supposed context is an “other,” in the sense of a succeeding segment of time, a “future life.”

It is commonly said that duration has nothing to do with the value of an experience: it is not temporal prolongation but quality that

counts. On this ground it is the aim of life to win some apprehension of the "eternal values," and with that attainment to be satisfied. Continuing to live adds nothing to the value of one's best moments; and to go on after those best moments into poorer ones is merely to degrade the total character of one's life. A longing for undying continuation is thus a sign of a certain lack of inner dignity, and indeed of unworthiness to continue, and the only way to be fit for immortality would be not to desire it.

If this were true, life ought to take the form of progress toward some climax of appreciation, followed at once by extinction. For to look back, even for a moment, at one's height, is to confess one's present decline. And there is indeed an aesthetic satisfaction in ending on one's best note, and a certain justice in the feeling that to a truly great experience there can be no sequel that is not a loss.

But why do we dread the sequel? Not because it is what it is—we know nothing about that—but because it is a something which intrudes upon the retrospect which belongs to a moment of elevation.

It is not the extinction of consciousness that



the great experience demands, but a lengthy, unoccupied time in which to realize what has occurred. The notion that time has nothing to do with value is thus exactly contrary to the psychological law of meaning! The intense experiences may be brief, but they are long looked forward to and long remembered. Like a noble building, they demand an adequate vista; and consciousness labors to provide it by amplifying the time of its undisturbed contemplation.

It may be doubted whether there is not some contradiction in speaking of a great experience "at a moment." For to be assaulted by the presence of greatness is not to take it in; a mountain makes no immediate impression of vastness—it conspires with the illusions of distance to conceal its proportions, and we only know them through the journey and the climb. The law of value-experience is similar; for our finite minds, if that which is noble is to be known, its apprehension must be built through a history of lesser things, and must be remembered and related to them all.

To cease, then, at the point of any attainment is to lose the full meaning of that attainment. From the mere logic of meaning, then,

there is no moment at which conscious existence could appropriately cease. And if there were such a thing as an "eternal value" accessible to us mortals, it would rightly call for unlimited time for its realizing.

f) *Continuity of historic reference*

Closely connected with this matter of duration is that of the historic continuity of the enquiring self. Meaning accumulates, much as a question persisted in through time accumulates its answer. Some questions are inseparable from individual existence, such as the questions "What am I?," "What is the world?," "What is the good?" Personal identity is made by the identity (not the similarity) of these questions over gaps of consciousness.

The continuity of memory does not itself constitute the identity of selfhood, but the pertinence of the contents of memory to its continued questions. The nature of selfhood shows itself in the nature of memory; for the self makes its own memory by its unconscious selection of what it deems significant, as data for its ultimate answers.

We were saying that among these remem-

bered events are the notable joys and elevations of experience. This is half the story. We remember also the notable depressions and evils. It is not that we consciously choose to remember them; we may prefer to cover them with a veil, but they remain as unwelcome guests. The psychoanalyst speaks, at times, as though they maintained themselves against our will; but no event has any power to continue its own being. As an event it is gone and only the mind can retain it, but it may be retained by the spontaneous loyalty of the reflective self to its own problem. The pains, sorrows and shames of life—what we summarily call its “evils”—are precisely those aspects of experience which are not understood—not yet understood. The pleasures and insights offer clues to the meaning of life; as momentary they do not constitute that meaning, but they intimate what it is like. Hence in memory suffering and evil are juxtaposed with them as the burden which they eventually have to lift, not exclude. Together they constitute the question which life—not so much contains—as is! How do these evils and these goods belong together?

Now it is a truism that this answer cannot

come to another questioner. In many points posterity will know what to us is unknown, and we are willing that our successors shall have that knowledge which is the tool for their own day's work. But my question—unless it is answered to me who ask it—is not answered at all. Someone else may and will carry on the general problem involved, and may get the general answer involved in my problem. But these questions of meaning and truth are not generalities merely; they are issues arising out of particular experience, and, divorced from that experience, that memory, that hardship, that injustice, they are empty.

Meaning grows through time, and it cannot grow great, or grow at all, by lopping off the first containers as if they could be decanted into another series. The early history of a question is part of the question, and the loss of the beginnings of the questions put to the world would be an irreparable loss of meaning. Continuance of personal questions is thus demanded for meaning, not merely because the questioner wants the future but because the future wants the questioner; it will always need its own past in order to be itself, just as the number series would be falsi-

fied as a counting system if the first  $n$  numbers were lopped off.

From these principles it is evident that the prevalent notion that interest in another world is intrinsically a subtraction from interest in this world is the precise reverse of the normal situation. It is true that men have often made a disease of otherworldliness, mooning and imagining and stealing their affections away, and deferring effort for justice, and abandoning this world as a rotting hulk. These, the fallacies of pure detachment, we have seen enough of.

We remark only that they cannot be cured by an effort to abolish the context of "this" world, in the supposition that the effort for human justice would then be intensified. This is the fallacy of all humanism and of all the current Marxist hostility to an otherworldly religion. The effort for justice remains in full vigor only when men are supposed ends-in-themselves, endowed with the dignity of right, free and of limitless possibility. Draw your line around the man at his death, cut across all the lines of his aspiration, snuff out all his major questions, quash all his

claims, declare all his unfinishedness a zero to the cosmos, and the nerve of all this concern for justice is also cut. Humanism tries to borrow for its humanitarian zeals an inherent worth in the individual human being which its premises forbid him to have. Without his continuance, his present cannot hold its own meaning and worth.

## VI

### MEANINGS OF LIFE: MYTH AND REALITY

**T**HERE is an aspect of Plato's meditations which appears instructive to me at this point. For the most part Plato inadvertently confirms the general impression that a vivid interest in immortality tends to the disparagement of the present existence. To him, this would be no sign of error; for in his views, this mode of life ought to be disparaged, just in so far as it is actually imperfect. He reflects the views of the Orphics and Pythagoreans according to which the soul, imprisoned in this body, would be more itself without the intrusions of sense and the contaminations of desire. Plato's proofs of immortality have received severe handling from subsequent philosophy, beginning with Aristotle, whose convincing picture of the organic union of soul and body made it clear that the unitary and simple entity which Plato proved invulnerable could not be a concrete surviving per-

son. But before Aristotle, Plato himself argued against Plato. For if the union of the soul with the body is, as he claims, a misfortune and a fall, there is no sufficient reason for birth, and still less reason, once the soul by death has escaped from the toils of the body, for resuming empirical existence. Human existence, however, is clearly not a meaningless affair for Plato. We can only conclude, then, that there is an unfinished element in his reasoning.

It is here that the myths of Plato are superior to his arguments, and represent more fully the real Plato. His convictions are there; his arguments are afterthoughts. Let us then condense, with large editorial liberties, the purport of pertinent Platonic myth on this point.

The soul after death spends an ample time in the underworld, passing through various adventures and tests. The time comes when it must return to earth. It must choose a new lot among a number which are spread out before it. It chooses on the basis of those preferences which have been bred in it by its former life or lives, and especially as impressed by their



disadvantages. It chooses something different! Then, passing through the plain of forgetfulness, it is shot forth to a new birth in the type of career of its own choosing.

The presumption of the picture is that this new lot in turn fails to bring the satisfaction which the soul had promised itself. Hence a new stage of value-judgment, a new death, a new choice, another experiment in living.

In this process, with its touch of irony, we see at once that empirical living has acquired a positive meaning for Plato. Life is to be regarded as *a stage of self-education in the soul's grasp of the meaning of the good*. It is an experimental enquiry. Its method is dialectical, as befits the education of a free agent. It is granted in each life what it thinks it wants, and so is led to a perception of what it more truly wants, by successively rectifying its imperfect hypotheses. This process may require for an average soul some ten thousand years; but the philosopher who makes a business of it—Plato playfully suggests—may work it through in three thousand! In any case, it is only through the assumption that the process is to be completed that the segment, this life,

acquires its meaning. Without the whole, the part remains meaningless.

In this respect the Platonic myth exemplifies the principle of meaning which I here present: immortality normally an addition to the significance of present living, not a subtraction from it. With the aid of Aristotle and subsequent thinkers we can give a greater concreteness to this meaning of the empirical element in thought. We see that Plato was wrong in supposing that there could be any soul without body or any perfection of idea without a temporal exemplification. We see that existence is itself an element of perfection, and that the Idea at work in the facts is more ideal than the Idea apart from the facts. And by dint of this we may venture another version of that total meaning of the time-process which lends itself to the parts.

✓ One is learning what it is to be a self, not merely by trying various careers and gaining wisdom through failure, but by building a self, a process which is an effort toward embodying reality.

It will be agreed by all varieties of thought that, in some sense, we are, in what we call

"experience," actively dealing with reality. The meaning of this term "reality" is elusive, and many prefer to drop it. But no one proposes a substitute, and for our present purpose we require no more recondite significance than the difference we all recognize between dealing with shams which collapse on testing, and dealing with veritable beings which survive all tests; or between false notions which we try to shed and true notions which we try to acquire; or between partial insight with which we may be culpably content, and a judgment stable and complete, which may require relentless effort. If reality is that factor in experience which persistently corrects false or partial views, we are, in a sense which we all understand, dealing with reality. Now in this process we are becoming real ourselves. This, I think, is the point of the matter.

No doubt a certain reality may be attributable to consciousness, by the mere fact that it exists. Descartes is quite right in pointing out that the thinking self cannot repudiate its own part in existence. But in my view, the reality which the self has at any time is a tenta-

tive basis upon which to acquire or achieve reality at another level.

What, then, is meant by the achieving of reality? We become real in proportion as we know truth and get rid of illusions. Yes; but when do we know truth? We are never sure of it until we can make it. The principle of our knowledge is the same as that of God's knowledge as Lactantius describes it: *solus potest scire qui fecit*. And if we look at the process of living with this idea in mind, we can see that we are, in fact, perpetually remaking the world, and in so doing coming to understand it, and, through understanding, becoming more completely real.

Our first remaking is in memory. Our world is given to us, let us say, in sense-perception and in impressions of connection or structure among these points; there is nothing we thus perceive which we cannot in principle recall. But how much of what we perceive do we actually recall? A few traits which strike us as essential and important. How good is this selective judgment? Try to draw the face of your best-known friend in his absence, and you are forcibly reminded that your memory has done far less than a perfect work—you are

by so much below "reality" in your grasp. In some such way as this my activity, because it must be concrete, is the continuous test of my conceptions. In so far as this process is successful, my conceptions become real in the sense of being adequate to reality; and the proof of it is that I can reproduce what I have first of all merely observed and accepted.

Now I cannot create an object without at the same time creating the type of domain or world-room in which it exists, and which enters into its existence. My creation thus takes the typical form of the work of art, in which I do bring forth out of my mental resources another space and time, another collocation of events and persons, structural lines and processional fragments out of another world; my work of "fiction" is my essay in reality, and my product passes judgment on myself. So far as I am, in my consciousness, fantastic, sentimental, brutal, shallow, thrill-greedy, romantic, morbid or otherwise unreal, my novel or my play, my picture or my song, will betray and advertise these characters: and with enough docility, I may have the fortune to see them myself, and move beyond them. So far as I have grasped the nature

of things, I will have given it back in a new version, but with an addition—the improvement which is “my idea” and which has never been thought before.

Among such creations there is one which is every man’s product, and in a peculiar sense each one’s own deed, namely, this empirical self. Every decision helps to make it; for every act has as its object (a) a change in the external world and (b) a conception of one’s self as author of that change. However much the self begins its career as a product of previous lives and of society, the excursive self which I send out into the world of events begins in time to bear the character of my handiwork. There is a large amount of failure in it and evasion of the hard work of becoming what I conceive a man to be; but, for better or worse, it is my product, and in making it I have become clearer in my notions of what reality in human nature is. I am prepared to make a better specimen!

If one were to conceive this life, then, as a sort of *apprenticeship in the capacity to create*, in which one’s advancement measures one’s degree of attained reality, one would be closely interpreting the empirical facts in the

light of an incessant striving, which may be largely subconscious. And, in particular, I am learning how to create a self.

We are inclined, in retrospect, to judge the meaning of a life, our own or others, somewhat in terms of achievement. We recount what a man has done. We praise it, in so far as some ideal has been worked into the fabric of human history. We conceive life as engaged, in so far as it is well bent, in the wholehearted service of ideal aims, some of which, in the providence of nature and society, get embodied in human work. But there are accidents in achievement and injustices in this retrospect. Is the accomplished deed, after all, the measure of the man, set as it is in a perishable and fickle stream of human eventuality? There are few eulogies which are satisfied with their catalogues of accomplishment, they seem uneasily aware that this is not the main thing. The count of what and how much seems an external attachment, only partly attributable to the man. Are there not some who in such terms achieve nothing? And are they therefore worthless? And must a man think of himself in these terms? What

is more melancholy than to feel bound to take the public view of one's self? Do we exist in order to act? Or do we act in order to exist? Our deepest instinct would suggest that what a man has not yet attained may be vastly more important than what he has performed; and that what he is, is more important than either. His true achievement is the degree of reality embodied in his character.

In point of fact, is there anything which more positively acts than what a man is? The reflexive self makes felt its continuous, inevitable, unuttered comment on the insufficiencies of the self of achievement, and whoever witnesses the deed, sees also the sign of that dissatisfaction, which continues to aim beyond it. The true meaning of a deed is what it means to the self which performs it; without this self the deed has no meaning at all; it is the "being" which attends and sustains all "doing" that assigns to it whatever depth of meaning it may have. In this sense there is no meaning at all except in the being of the self.

And if this self vanishes, and all like it, meaning vanishes out of the world. No achievement can keep the person alive, but the continuance of the person is a guaranty



that such values as that shall not reduce to nothing. It is the person who perpetuates the achievement, not the achievement the person.

This estimate of meaning has fallen into disrepute with the spread of the pragmatic philosophy, which has no ultimate estimate of being except in terms of doing. In the proposal we here make we have assigned a place to pragmatism, since active attachment is necessary to a sound detachment, and one must work in order to be real. But we make being primary.

Now the embarrassment of considering being as the substance of meaning is that it is just this which death appears to annihilate. One's deeds live after him; what one is, or was, remains only as a flavor or aroma which passes with the personal impression. There are, to be sure, habit-ridden scholars who continue to amass knowledge to the day of their death, as if forgetting that it, of all things, must perish with the brain. There are devotees like the dying Proust who continue to discipline their souls to the very end. Bosanquet conceived the soul as the finest product and soul-building the major occupation of the universe; and yet just this soul he thought the

vulnerable and perishable thing. Is there not in this blind cultivation of the self a certain fanaticism, a subjective momentum, a desperate drawing of water from failing wells—or perhaps a certain quixotic disdain of sense in the arbitrary interest of holding one's plume intact? Why should one who can no longer *do* insist on *being*?

It may be blindness, or the high gesture of the sporting spirit, still conscious in anticipation of the imagined admiring glances of surviving men; or if going out alone—as the last man might—preferring to leave on the night the echoes of a defiant lover of Stoic virtue, as if, paradoxically, the unconscious world would have to remember! A futile subjective conceit, or a dogma of aesthetic preference! But also, it may be wisdom and a deeper sense for the realities of the world. In my view it is this deeper thing. We care for being more than for achievement, because being, in this sense, is an enduring potentiality; and this can only signify potentiality for further life. The self that is produced, one's dated creation, this self vanishes; the reflective self, having attained a measure of reality in that creative deed, is ready for another essay in creation.

## VII

### CONCLUSION: MYSTIC AND REALIST

OUR conclusion is not a metaphysical doctrine. It is a proposal about certain conditions which are necessary if human life is to have an adequate meaning, whether for the modern man or for any other man.

One such condition is that human life must have a supplement, a perspective of perpetuity. Another, that this present existence may be considered as an invitation to take on reality, understanding by this term not the phenomenal and passing reality which we have in hand but a complete and radical reality, an equivalence to whatever powers there are in the world which environs us.

To become real in any such sense would be an endless task, requiring endless time; yet it is a direction which we instinctively take and in the course of the human span achieve something of. Without any prior weighing of better or worse, we drive as we can toward 'objectivity' of mind and judgment. We fear illusion as the primordial plague, and piece by piece get

rid of our private stock of vanities, fancies, superstitions about ourselves and the world. Punished as these follies are by failure and chagrin, we are compelled as well as drawn toward a deeper genuineness in observing, laboring, imagining, planning. The 'real' in the world outside us patiently corrects our subjectivities and errors: and by dint of this, the pain and labor of 'experience,' we arrive at an entertainment of relative truth; we become relatively 'réal.'

- Could we fully attain reality, the survival of death would necessarily follow; for it belongs to the real that it *lasts*. But since what we can attain is only a degree and kind of realness, there is only a possibility that this degree and kind may carry through the crises of death. We here assert no more than this possibility.

It may well be that the survival of death is not a foregone conclusion, as if each person with or against his will were doomed to everlastingness. The soul is certainly not endowed, as Plato thought, with the fixed, substantial degreeless reality of the atom. It possesses, we think, not immortality but immortability. It depends upon itself what degree

of realness it comes to possess. Immortality may be "put on"; one may also put on mortality. The soul may resolve to take the present, partial scene of things as final, and may by determined action upon that hypothesis make it true for its own experience. It is the nemesis of an imperfect realism that its illusions become its effective reals.

The primary evidence for this view of things lies in experience, an aspect of experience which the modern man shares with the primitive, an intuition which it may be difficult for him to single out, but which he need not have lost nor in the fullest light of science forego. I refer to that deep-lying innocence of the mind (its 'negative wholeness') whereby it carries on its living *as though there were to be no temporal end* of its being.

It is this innocence, challenged by the factual limits of life, which brought forward the first crude doctrines of the survival of death, and lent to the hard existence of aboriginal folk a glimmer of significance. Without this same perception our own lives, far richer in spotwise satisfactions, are poorer than theirs and drift toward a zero of meaning.

So far as we can recover this our own underlying sense of unlimited ongoing, we can recognize at once how far from truth is the fear that the fringe of otherness which supplements this life—the “other world”—is hostile to full-minded attention to this present business. The measure of possible detachment from this occupation is at the same time the measure of possible attachment to it. It is *by way of* that whole-vista that I am able to value this part. The simplicity of the child allows it whole-heartedness in every moment: the mature man cannot retain that childish simplicity, but he may retain its rational equivalent. Note carefully that the child is *not* treating his present moment “as if it were all”; for anyone who regards the present moment as all, as if he were saying of it, “This which I now have is the end: let me make the most of it,” is incapable of whole-hearted absorption in that moment: his mind is obsessed by the fact of limit or boundary, and what might be beyond it. To be able to give oneself whole-heartedly to the present one must be persistently aware that it is *not all*. One must rather be able to treat the present moment as if it were engaged in the business allotted to

it by that total life which stretches indefinitely beyond.

For most purposes of experience, it is better to leave this supplement of life in the simple and pseudo-negative form of "no cessation, no absolute finitude," rather than attempt to grasp the total purport of existence in any phrase such as "knowing things as they are" or "attaining reality." For as we consciously define our ultimate end, we burden all action with a double purpose: each act has its own immediate aim, but then it also contributes (or should contribute) to that ultimate end. Indeed I ought to consider my act primarily in that latter light, and so, after all, my wider aim threatens to detract from my present aim. This has been the bane of all pietisms, that every act had not only its own burden, but also the burden of God's glory, or some other aspect of the cosmic process. Life was dignified by the nobility of its horizon, but also solemnized, and its spontaneity impaired.

Thus the philosopher, like the theologian, seems doomed to intrude upon the normal simplicities of human behavior an extraneous consciously ideal aim. He is bound to do this:

he can only meet the problem of meaning which life sets in terms of conceptions, even while acknowledging the flimsiness of the intellectual cages in which he endeavors to imprison what always escapes formulation. But he is equally bound to indicate the position of the *mystic*, who escapes this difficulty.

It is the special function of the mystic to remind us of the risks of all definition, while adhering to an equally vigorous insistence that there is something there which we must forever try to define. Maintaining a rigidly skeptical aloofness toward all "conceptions" (except one or two!), he is all the more emphatic about those meager assertions in which he feels himself impregnable. Such as these: that *there is a meaning* in the whole of things; that we are always dimly aware of it; and that it is possible to raise the dim awareness to a firm immediate conviction.

This first assertion, that there is meaning, is a thin assertion—a mere 'that' without a 'what'—such as mystics delight in to the provocation of all who desire concreteness. Yet its very thinness ensures that it will never get into the way of present action. And it may



well be the most important assertion to set into our foundations. For if it is certain that there is a meaning, it becomes reasonable to spend a lifetime or more in the search for it, and to reject those negations repeatedly put forward by the confusion of philosophic voices or by the perplexities of one's own experience. If it is *not* certain that there is a meaning, the zeal for finding it might reasonably at some time give out. We are naturally disposed to give life the benefit of the doubt and to take the pragmatic attitude, "*Act as if life were worth living*"—as good a risk as any to push out on: we can adhere to this in all good faith as long as courage holds out; but if indeed we are acting purely on a working-hypothesis, sustained by ourselves, we must be prepared to meet facts which will require a negative verdict. The mystic rejects all such pragmatism; he has his certainty: and because of it, he is forever debarred, and would debar others, from indulging in the luxury of despair.

If we ask him how he can be certain, the mystic refers us to that which is always better than proof, immediate experience. It is that same thread of experience that we have been

following, the primitive innocence which asserts "No end," the simplicity of the child's absorption, but with this additional and positive character, an indefinable awareness of ultimate worth in what he now does. He declares (with full awareness of the paradox) that this distant and elusive meaning is always dimly felt as an inseparable quality of on-going experience, too close to us to be clearly discerned but also too close to be doubted.

If we disavow any such experience on our own part, he displays the same invincible and preposterous assurance about our experience and the experience of others as he has about his own, as if he had access to the unities which run through and beneath the separate pools of selfhood. He appeals if necessary from our ordinary consciousness to subconsciousness; he asks us to witness that in our very elemental hold on biological existence a vein of enjoyment and a vein of suffering lie close together, each binding us to life more strongly because of the presence of the other. He hints that there are arts of attention which, fanning this central value-sense into a strong illumination, may reveal for an in-

stant the ties which connect the present self with the uncharted field of universal meaning, and leave this vision as a permanent conviction of the conscious self. He points out that there are moments in which this awareness comes to the fore, and certifies not alone the passing event but all others. There are occasions for every man in which the usual sense of being a very minor factor in events disappears into a new sense of validity and freedom: "I can take care of *this* event; what is before me to do, I *can* do, and to that extent budge all the facts of the universe from within this small focus of action." At this moment one ceases to weigh the various alternative means to his ends; he ceases to doubt the validity of his ends. "Only one thing is worth doing, that is supremely worth doing, and it has ceased to be hard to do, you cannot say why."<sup>1</sup> The self has projected its concern quite beyond the rim of its private enclosure, and leaning hard against the outer resistance, like Samson against the pillars, feels it *give*! This is freedom in the concrete, the genuine and full-fledged freedom:

<sup>1</sup> C. E. Montague: *A Memoir*, p. 299. See also his short story "Action" for an illustration of this experience.

in that experience one knows himself to be as real as the outside world. One knows, too, that the meaning of things is presently felt by him, as running through that act of his.

Taken by himself, the mystic is likely to be an encouraging person, but also a tantalizing person, running a risk at least as grave as that of the philosophical definer, that of mistaking subjective confidence for objective truth. Yet he is no mere mythologist; he is one who sees and calls on others to see. In my judgment he is right in his primary assertions, that there is a total meaning in things, and that we are all dimly aware of it, and may thus be certain that it exists. Unless there is an immediately felt meaning there is no meaning at all: no future meaning could compensate for a complete absence of meaning in the present moment; and whatever meaning life may come to possess hereafter must be simply the ampler interpretation of the meaning which it now has. I could not seek it, had I no present clue to that which I am seeking. I could not yearn for what is not here, unless yearning could contemplate that which is

missing, and in contemplating enjoy its image.

At the same time, this immediate certainty is not enough. If living were so much its own always available and sufficient apology there would be no reason for a program of action and change. Taking him strictly at his word, the mystic, like the Stoic, would have to refer the whole business of daily life to some inferior mechanism, such as the conventional round of duties. In point of biographical fact, he is not usually thus consistent. He commonly finds himself, in practical affairs, a strenuously effective individual, like some Savonarola or Eckhart or Loyola. Sometimes he condescends to this 'realism' with an uneasy sense of duplicity, as if he ought to be an alien in this world of fact. More often he perceives that the art of life must unite, in some fashion, its realistic with its mystical phases, and seeks some further understanding of this union. As a matter of practical program, we all tend to alternate between the two.

We must be realists in action, definite, analytical, responsible, critical, separating good and evil, refusing to palliate or be

reconciled to the violence, cruelty, and callousness of the world, concentrated on the task on hand and its object as if they were all-important, as if experience were to have just such value as by these efforts we can extract from it and no more.

And then, when through the very vehemence of our concentration the value and sense of what we are doing leak away from it, as tends to happen at the end of every day's work, we must become mystics in order to renew that sense of the whole which can shed its value down again on the parts. We have to recover, by some art or other, what Mencius called our "child's heart" and what Lao Tze called *Tao*, the nameless simplicity of being and outlook which confers proportion, unity and wholeness upon the distraught fragments of endeavor. These are but other names for that aboriginal hold on ultimate reality which, the mystic rightly says, is inalienable from human selfhood.

All normal living finds its sanity through some version of this alternation or rhythm. But alternation, a practical solution, is not an understanding. Can the realist include this mystic in his view, or can the mystic ab-

sorb the realist, or can some third view include both?

In the end, the mystic finds the reason for his realistic phase, though to explain it he resorts once more to myth. He feigns that since his action in time affects the fortunes of others beside himself, he has some particular thing to do *for them* (and not alone for his own development as a real) though he knows not what it is. In this sense his active life is an infinite network of crossings of paths, in each of which crossings or encounters with others he transmits to them such reality as he has, until then, attained. Life thus contains a series of *rendezvous* with Destiny; and all living, full of potential adventure, has the significance of preparation for such encounters. The peril of living is that one may miss the meeting with Destiny, or fail through unfitness to do that which was then and there to be done.

Confucius, who like many men of great reticence on metaphysical questions has been reputed an agnostic, was in this sense a mystic. When his life had been endangered by an attack at K'uang he said in effect "Heaven

(Tien) has appointed me to teach this doctrine; until I have done so, what can the people of K'uang do to me?" Many a mystic (and many a soul not so designated) has retained this sense that his life, with its many pseudo-accidental entanglements, is woven into some total purport, his *agendum* par excellence. In Hutchinson's story, "If Winter Comes," there are the two inveterate chess-players, Fergus and Saber. Fergus is one who insists (like a proper mystic) that his life has a particular purpose, though he does not know what it is. Saber confronts him with realistic skepticism, and the dialogue runs on somewhat as follows:

Saber: "How can you pursue a purpose if you don't know what it is?"

Fergus: "How can you try for a solution of a chess problem if you don't know what it is?"

Saber: "But you know that there is a solution."

Fergus: "That's it; and you know that there is a purpose!"

Whatever may be the play of poetry within this myth of the *agendum*, there is a basis of literal truth which the philosopher will



sometime extract and confirm. It contains at least this: That, just as a work of art—if it is a good work—means the universe, while in turn, the universe means *it*, exists for such as it, so life, always tending toward futurity without end, means that ultimate goal, but in turn the ultimate goal means *it*. If there is no total meaning, none of the daily details can conserve importance. *If there is an eternal meaning*, there is nothing better in all futurity than some of the things which human life, here in the middle of time, may contain. If there is an absolute sense of existence, life has nothing better to do, at any time, than to move toward the human encounter in which real may speak to real, and in so doing give alms to the Absolute. And while the “attainment of reality” is a general aim, identical for everybody and hence giving no special reason for my existence or yours, this conception of the personal *agendum*, as containing what the universe means, lends to each self and to each deed the weight of the world’s expectancy and need, which I alone, in this pass, can meet.

Thus the mystic view absorbs the realist view: the true mystic has to be, and can be,

a realist, as the realist cannot be a mystic without cracking his realistic frame of being. The mystic performs the miracle which the realist requires but cannot perform for himself,—restores amplitude to the detail of living and renews its ebbing values, therewith conserving the verve and effectiveness of its enterprises. But he can do this only by way of the greater miracle, that of bringing dawn back into the sunset, and the endless otherness of life into the crux of death.

THE END

*APPENDIX:*  
*BIOLOGY AND THE MEANING OF*  
*HUMAN LIFE*



## I

### THE EMERGENCE OF LIFE

**T**HE broadest fact—or apparent fact—about the setting of biological phenomena is that life, including human life, once emerged out of inanimate Nature. Whether, having emerged, life ever lost its grip and had to emerge again, no one knows; it may be that, since the organic is by its nature self-continuing, the first emergence was definitive, and the history of life since that first era unintermittent.

Whether consciousness accompanied the first living forms, and by implication accompanies all living forms, may be taken as a speculative question for which no conclusive evidence can be had. The usual assumption is that consciousness and reason belong only to the more complex of the series of living forms. They may be called “higher” emergents, in the sense that they include simpler forms within themselves.

The organic series is an exception to a

rule which obtains generally among physical aggregates. Ordinarily, the more complicated a natural object is, the more transitory it is. Conversely, the more simple are the more durable; and were there any absolutely elementary or atomic beings, they would presumably be as permanent as Nature itself. But an organic body can only exist on condition of being highly complex; and its striking peculiarity is that it tends to preserve its own being as a continued pattern. Increasing complication of organic bodies commonly means a more perfect array of self-preserving organs, and so the principle of relative perishableness is reversed: the more complex an organic body, the longer it is likely to endure.

If we were to sum up the respects in which a living organism differs from an inanimate body or from a machine, we should have to make use of the word "self." The organism builds itself, as the inorganic body does not. There are machines which feed and fuel themselves; but none which grow by feeding. The organism repairs itself—within limits—as the machine cannot do. The organism, if it moves, directs itself. Its most extraordinary trait is that it reproduces itself; and does so

in other organisms which have the same self-reproducing property; so that a given organism contains within itself at any moment one of the conditions for an endless series of similar organisms strung out in endless time.

This word "self" is an ambiguous word for the organic body. To say that the organism "builds itself" is not to propose a separate and durable entity which assembles the materials for its adult form, puts them together, and leaves them. The materials of the living body do not remain in place: there is thus no stable material "self." The organism is a flux of physical ingredients and energies. The identity of the self is the identity of a process, each stage of which is devoted to assembling the conditions for the next stage. The total sequence of these stages constitutes a closed curve called the life-cycle of the organism. Within this life-cycle, the organism is identified by its form and continuity of movement or position, its form being subject to continuous but relatively slow change.

But the word "self" is subject to another danger. It suggests conscious intention. When one speaks of the growth of a tree as a process

of self-building, one thinks of an inner agency working out a plan; the figure is misleading. What happens is that the mature individual *is built*, and that the identifiable form *is preserved*, and *is reproduced*; because these peculiar molecular ingredients, with these peculiar properties, in these peculiar environments, operate that way. The biologist must specifically refrain from assigning a resident purpose to the result, or any part of it. Neither has the result any meaning for the biologist.

Considering the whole story of organic evolution, it looks as though Nature were trying for something, throwing up more and more complex, unstable, delicately balanced, marvelously self-continuing objects, adapting themselves to varying environments, producing an internal environment of their own, more and more highly homeostatic (so that a great physiologist is moved to write a book on *The Wisdom of the Body*). It looks, I say, as if Nature, at least, had an end in view, even if these organisms do not (so that another physiologist refers to the universe as "biocentric"). But this figure of speech has no more scientific standing than to suppose that Na-



ture, as one stands at the seashore watching the surf in a rising wind, is endeavoring to produce higher and higher combers, with the mounting persistence of a more and more perilous balance, and a more thunderous fall. The one history has as little meaning as the other.

## II

### THE EMERGENCE OF MIND

**B**UT somewhere in this series of living forms, mind emerges. This is an awkward fact, but it appears to be an objective fact. It is awkward, because it cannot be observed with the same instruments used in physiological observation, nor measured by the centimeter-gram-second system of units. It is objective, because the biologist cannot repudiate his own mind; and cannot fairly assume it to be a solitary instance in the universe of that sort of thing! Further, in his own case, it seems to have a certain biological utility; and if he could determine what that utility precisely is, he could perhaps understand where (if not why) mind emerged. The logic of biological survival is such that useless organs are commonly eliminated in the course of a comparatively short phylogenetic period. Mentality, as an emergent—if it follows this analogy—must somehow

have earned its way. The biologist is thus led to search for something which mind can do for the organism, and which its other organs could *not* do—though he does not know how to deal scientifically with an *invisible organ*!

We thus open an exciting chapter of biological speculation entitled “The biological utility of consciousness”!

Jacques Loeb was not inclined to ascribe any functions to mentality which he could explain by chemical or other “tropisms”; but he was disposed to think that whenever an organism showed *educability*, mind must be present. The function of the mind was to remember, and to modify present reactions in view of what had happened in previous reactions. But today any tyro in psychology will explain to you the mechanism whereby the burnt child fears the fire: mentality is not necessary to educability in this sense. The same may be said for the criterion proposed by William James: the pursuit of ends with the choice of means. A *robot* built with a repertoire of responses which could be run through, one after the other, might seem

from the outside to be trying a variety of means to gain some particular end. It is very hazardous to try to build a place for mentality on what a cunningly devised physiological apparatus could not perform.

### III

#### HOW MIND SUBSERVES THE SUPPOSED ENDS OF NATURE

**I**T SEEMS much more promising to consider what function our minds, in the one case directly known to us, appear actually to perform in keeping the organism out of trouble.

The mind appears to its user to be biologically useful, especially in dealing with unclassified (or unclassifiable) situations. If situations likely to arise in the life of an organism could be classified in advance, some ingenious arrangement might conceivably be devised which would "respond" in an auspicious way to some constant feature of that situation. It is vitally important, for example, to meet dangers; and dangers can to some extent be classified in advance. Fire, falling, sudden noises, and so on provoke in the human infant appropriate reactions. So, if we may believe Dr. Thorndike, the "big black object approaching rapidly" finds a way to

the fear reactions through a congenital channel. Now such an arrangement would necessarily register alarm for every such "big black object," whether a bear or father-in-a-black-overcoat. The important distinction to make is that between friend and foe; and this distinction is not definable in terms of sensations. The attitudes which may signify friendly or hostile intent are endlessly variable, and are organically unclassified if not unclassifiable. If the organism is to adjust itself to this important distinction in its environment, it would seem better that it should have a mind. And in fact, this distinction is one of the things with which our minds are constantly busy.

(Part of the difficulty of the argument on this point hitherto has arisen from the fact that the question has been put: How much can physiology accomplish when carried to the limit of its possibilities? But no aspect of nature is thus carried to the limit. If another, more efficient principle is available, it will step in while the mechanical possibilities are still unexhausted.)

Note, too, that the organism is concerned not merely with partials within a situation,

but always with a total situation; and that this total situation is always unique. So far as situations can be classified in prearranged responses, there could be for that organism *no novelty*: it would always do the proper thing, and there would always be the prepared proper thing to do. But if the total situation (which includes the conditions it arises out of—some of its own past) is to be considered: *no robot could either be constructed or conceived* to meet it. If responses are to have a genuinely historical character, they must be made by a mind.

Suppose we agree, then, that mind does in some way aid the organism to survive, and that this, biologically, is what it means—we have a perfectly clear cut interpretation of human life. For though, on the mechanical level, the organism and its endurance have no meaning at all, yet when consciousness arrives, everything it cares for has a meaning. And if it cares for the survival of the body, then its life takes on the meaning which, in the biologist's figure of speech, it seemed to have for Nature. Human life becomes an instrument for Nature's fancied ends!

## IV

### HOW NATURE SUBSERVES THE SUPPOSED ENDS OF MIND

WE ARE perhaps a little disturbed to learn that consciousness knows nothing about these ends of Nature, at least at first. It neither eats in order to build its body nor loves in order to produce offspring. It is not consciously preoccupied with self-preservation. All of these are taken care of as incidents in its own drives. We are thus notified of a principle which wholly changes the aspect of our study, namely,

*Mind can serve, only at the cost of being master!*

In other words, mind being by nature an end-seeking entity, it is impossible for it to seek any ends not its own. (The whole nervous mechanism is arranged with this peculiarity in view, as indeed it had to be. Consciousness is wholly incompetent to supervise bodily nourishment, and wholly unnecessary for that object: it can supervise



the risky aspect of the process, namely, getting the foodstuffs into the top end of the digestive canal. It is still more incompetent to supervise reproduction—"canst thou make the bones to grow in the womb of her that is with child?"—but it can deal with the prior variables of the environment, and with the copulatory act. It cannot operate the muscles, but it can manage limb-movements. If it finds pleasure in effecting these critical and uncertain conjunctions, it can serve the ends of Nature; otherwise it is of no use whatever to Nature.) And it is impossible for it *not* to seek its own ends, whether or not they coincide with the ends attributed to Nature. In point of fact, they vary materially from Nature's ends, both by defect (as pointed out above) and by excess.

There are certain enjoyments which seem to have been strategically located, as if by a cunning of Nature, so that Nature will be incidentally served. Thus there is an enjoyment for the normal organism in taking food; this joy is located, so to speak, at the point of risk—the critical question for survival being whether food-stuffs will or will not make connection with the upper end of the alimen-

tary canal. If this can be accomplished, Nature will attend to the actual nourishing of the body without invoking the attention of consciousness, unless something goes wrong. So it happens that animals do not in any conscious sense "build themselves"; they simply enjoy the superficial process we call "eating," at the instigation of a warning called "hunger" whose physiological meaning only the learned know.

But since eating is pleasurable, man makes an art of it, tries out the gamut of possible pleasures of taste, and develops a culinary repertoire and skill which have little to do with the biological needs of the organism. Instead of seeking food in order to assuage hunger, men have been known to cultivate hunger in order to enjoy food; they have been known to eat and drink more things and other things than hygiene would prescribe. Thus man builds a small world of his own values around the fragment proposed by Nature.

This is still more strikingly true of the pleasures of the eye. It was impossible for Nature to accord the organism vision of just those things which might be important for

vital adjustments, and no more. If it opened an eye, the eye surveyed an entire field, containing near and distant sources of light, nearby flashes and remote stars, all of them appearing to him in a field which he calls "space" and regards as continuing behind him as well as before him, swallowing him up and extending outward without limit. He begins playing with infinitude long before he can use more than neighboring events; and the joys of color and form have little to do with his struggle for existence, though they seem to have some mysterious relation to his mating.

So for the field of sounds. So also for the field of curiosity, which has its biological utility, but on the spur of which man builds, in thought, a universe. The needs of the body, in all this, are not lost; but they sink into incidentality. Consciousness has arrived as an instrument and a servant; but it has taken its place as master of the house, and the ends it serves are first of all, its own.

These ends will take him far, even to the extent of turning upon the Nature that has produced him and altering her shape and disposition; using her own vast forces to

reshape her own immensities, until—if he could succeed—Nature becomes his hand-work as he was once hers.

This reversal of dominance has sometimes been described in the phrase that the means have become ends—the means to nature's assumed interests have become, for the human being, ends in themselves. Instead of eating to live and seeing to live, one lives to see and to eat; instead of being curious in order to know and knowing in order to survive, man survives in order to know.

Certain it is that man takes an intrinsic satisfaction in knowing, and makes no apologies for this non-utilitarian concern. Through the co-operation of his senses, his imagination, and his thought, he builds a picture of his total world, extends it in space and in time, loads the future with all his unrealized possibilities, loads the past with all his memories and his historical conjectures, reconstructs the story of evolution, and—perhaps to his own surprise—*sees himself emerging*. The picture is his product; and he appears as part of his own picture. He is attempting to construct an image of his world; and he can do so only by constructing an image of himself.

## V

### ON WHAT CONDITIONS CAN MAN RETAIN SIGNIFICANCE

NOW in view of the origin of this world-image, it is necessarily the region in which the drama of human values is played out. Its future is man's realm of hope. Its past and present are his realm of confused and partial satisfaction, dismay, conjecture, defeat and resurgent resolve. The whole of this world-picture is shot full of the color of his interests. In it, there is no bifurcation of Nature; because the Nature he reconstructs is the Nature of his experience, the Nature of his destiny as he sees it—the Nature *within him*, all of whose mathematically calculated world-lines, intersecting where they will, come to some relevance for his purposes. This world is not only within him but *for him*. For he feels himself a result worth bringing about.

We need here to point out the inevitability of this sentiment—which is not egoism, and hardly self-conscious. The principle of Descartes, “I think, therefore I am,” was set

up in the interest of a theoretical certainty. But there is a corresponding value-certainty: "*I value, therefore I am valuable.*" One can doubt the value of everything in the universe except the valuer, for with his disappearance the whole world of values collapses. Self-awareness therefore brings with it an inevitable self-estimation, which is in no sense invidious or comparative, but simply a recognition of the principle that all valuation refers itself to percipient and perspective centers of appreciation, such as this individual self is.

It is sometimes made a question whether there is any difference in principle between the human mind and other minds in the organic series; and whether it is not a mark of undue conceit for man to think of the world as debouching in himself when it has equally brought forth the mouse, the mosquito, the myriapod, the amoeba . . . and has maintained their posterity until now. The difference does not lie in the fact of survival. It lies in the *building of this picture, and in the self-cognizance* and the self-questioning and world-questioning which arrive with it. If there are any values in the world, such world-consciousness is among them.

Whether or not the world as a whole can be thought to be self-conscious, it arrives at a vicarious self-consciousness in man. And so far as we can judge, it arrives at this self-consciousness in no other of its products. This is sufficient to set human kind apart in the known order of possible value.

But the question which this self-conscious individual straightway directs at the world which has produced him, is just this—"Is there any kinship between you and me? I value things, do you? Is this whole field of values a subjective product—a kingdom projected by the peculiarities of the consciousness of the valuer having nothing to do with the facts? Or, since I have made within myself this imaged-world, and am in this sense a microcosm, are you, who work beyond, a thing of similar character, a self? If so, then these meanings of mine are not necessarily merely subjective or merely human. Qualities may then really belong to the universe and not merely to me!"

Whether they do so belong appears to reflective man not an idle question. For unless he can give this sort of objective validity to his values, they cannot force themselves out of the frame of illusion. The bifurcation of

Nature can be banished on no other terms. There is no *tour de force* by which man, seeing his plight, can escape judging his values by the respect which time and energy pay to them. If they are transitory they are subjective, and if subjective they are false, because they come to him with the aspect of like objective validity with the other factors of the natural world.

In other words, while meaning is built up from part to whole (and the whole takes the color of the spots of value which it elicits just as any indifferent region on becoming a 'home' takes the quality of the joys and sufferings there lived through) there is that other law of meaning, whereby it *descends from the whole to the parts*. This law cannot be evaded. And these very momentary experiences of pleasure and pain—not impervious to the horizon in which they are placed—change not alone their savor but their immediate quality, under the judgment man forms of the character or lack of character of the whole.

It appears then that the meaning of human life suggested by biology lies outside the



sphere of biology. The "ends of Nature" which mentality must somehow aid, if it is to have any place in biological theory, are pseudo-ends so long as Nature is assumed to be unconscious. The "ends of man" which arise with the emergence of man, are not identical with the ends of Nature, but promote them only as an incident of their own promotion. And finally, these human ends can only retain their validity for the human being by being given a locus in an objective mind not identical with Nature. The biological picture of evolution appears to assign meaning to human life because, and only because, we are instinctively ready to commit this threefold breach of the strictly biological framework. If we are aware of what we thus do, we see that we have gone across from biology into metaphysics. And the metaphysics we have been using is not that of emergent evolution, but more nearly that of Aristotle in his dictum that the nature of things is best seen in their completion, rather than in their apparent origins. From which follows an ancient intuition, that in the nature of things life is deeper than matter, and mind deeper than life.



## INDEX

- Absolute, 191, 231  
 Absurdity, 102f.  
 Achievement, 123, 213  
 Activity, 63f., 118-125, 149f.  
 Actuality, 39, 74, 90, 92, 190  
*Adler*, 168  
 Aesthetic, 7f., 198  
*Agendum*, 136-8, 230f.  
 Alternation, principle of, 227-230  
 Altruism, 132, 135, 180  
 Anaesthesia, 8  
 Analogy, 99  
 Animal faith, 154  
 Apperception, 66, 70, 74  
 Appreciation, 128-130  
*Aristotle*, 43ff., 55, 205, 255  
 Art, 39f., 211, 231, 248  
 Attachment, 23  
  
*Bakunin*, 179  
*Bali*, 120, 138  
 Behaviorism, 33f., 165f.  
 Being vs. Doing, 215f.  
*Bergson*, 151, 154  
 Biology and meaning, 153, 178, 235, 255  
 Birth, 91  
 Body, *see* Mind and body  
*Bosanquet*, B., 215  
 Bovarysme, 84  
 Brain, 34, 44, 45, 78, 166  
     *See also* Mind and Body  
 Buddhism, 176  
  
 Certainty, 103, 105, 223, 252  
*Chesterton*, G., 194  
 Childhood, 13, 121, 220, 228  
 Christianity, 133, 177f., 180f.  
 Church, 112, 146-148  
 Civilization, 183  
 Communication, 29, 92  
 Conditional Immortality, 107-109  
*Confucius*, 176, 229f.  
 Consciousness, 18, 33f., 53, 165f., 235, 240, 246  
 Construction, 53  
 Continuity, 76, 101f., 200-203  
 Creativity, 83-85, 89, 110  
  
 Dated self, 21f., 72, 75, 216  
 Decision, 21, 73, 77, 89f., 212  
 Dependence, 106  
*Descartes*, 49, 57, 59, 209  
 Destiny, 136-138, 229f.  
 Detachment, 23, 178-204, 220  
*Dewey*, John, 169-172, 174f., 189, 192  
 Dialectic, 207  
 Discontinuity, 76, 80  
 Dogma, 112  
 Dream, 40, 48  
 Duality, Principle of, 61, 62-85, 87, 156, 182  
 Duplicate control, 45f.  
 Duration as element of value, 98, 197-200  
  
 Economic value, 120

- Emergence, 118, 235-242, 250, 255  
 Empirical, 3, 28, 29, 42, 61, 71, 89, 112, 170, 181, 184, 219  
 End, 118, 123, 139, 238, 243-249  
 Enjoyment, 118, 193  
 Entelechy, 43  
 Entropy, 78  
 Eternal, 75, 77, 95, 102f., 106, 174, 198, 231  
 Evil, 12, 95, 201  
 Excursive self, 72, 109  
 Experience, 52f., 218, 223  
 Experiment, -alism, 171, 175  
  
 Fallacy of isolation, 102, 186  
 Fallacy of totalism, 100  
 Feeling, history of, 179  
 Fertility, 134, 183, 195f.  
 Flux, 17, 80-83, 117, 140  
 Freedom, 24, 25, 89f., 103f., 225  
*Freud, S.*, 168  
  
*Gauguin*, 120, 151  
*Gaultier, J. de*, 84  
 General and particular, 155, 169  
     *See also* Universal  
 God, 3, 90, 111, 120, 135, 146f., 173, 185-193, 255  
*Grenfell*, 133-135  
 Growth, 136  
  
*Hegel*, 149, 191  
 History, 245  
*Hobbes*, 69  
 Humanism, 35, 100f., 147, 181, 185, 191, 204  
*Hume*, 57, 69, 82  
  
 Idea, Ideal, 102f., 169, 174, 189  
 Idealism, 32, 57, 88f., 191, 255  
 Identity of self, 80-83, 200  
 Idling, 119  
 Illusion of local value, 186  
 Image, 46  
 Imagination, 39, 168-173, 195  
 Immanence, 191  
 Immediacy of value, 117-122, 124, 130, 135, 138, 139, 141, 226  
 Immortality, 108, 112, 218  
 Immortality, 198, 218f.  
 Incredulity, 5, 18  
 Individual, -ity, 16, 91, 92  
 Inequality, 15  
 Infinite, 38, 48, 68, 75, 85, 89f., 134, 138, 141, 249  
 Instinct, 121, 152  
 Instrumentalism, 169  
 Integration, 169, 189, 192, 220  
 Intensity, 124f.  
 Interruption, 88  
 Intuition, 98, 105f., 151  
 Irrational, -ity, 22, 94, 105, 134, 154  
  
*James, W.*, 241  
*Jung, C. G.*, 146, 167f., 189  
 Justice, 8, 203f.  
     *See also* Right  
  
*Kant*, 7, 38, 64, 69, 135  
 Knowledge, 32f.  
  
 Language, 53-58  
*Lao Tze*, 228  
 Last moment, 18, 87  
 Life-cycle, 20, 42, 140, 153, 237

- Limit, 20  
 Link, 167  
 Loeb, Jacques, 241  
 Love, 13, 110, 126-131, 134  
  
 Marx, 179, 203  
 Materialism, *see* Naturalism;  
     Behaviorism  
 Maturity, 20, 68  
 Meaning, 28, 30, 121, 139,  
     149, 155-163  
 Meaninglessness, 140, 150,  
     153, 161, 166  
 Memory, 65, 79, 200f., 210  
 Mencius, 228  
 Metempsychosis, 35  
 Mind and body, 27, 30, 32,  
     41ff., 51  
 Monism, 35  
 Montague, C. E., 225  
 Monuments, 10, 79  
 Moral identity, 82  
 Mystic, -ism, 109, 137f., 177,  
     217-230  
 Myth, 148, 205-215, 229  
  
 Naturalism, 33, 101, 110, 171  
 Nature, 36, 110  
 Negative wholeness, 17, 68,  
     69, 75, 95, 219  
 Nietzsche, 133, 140  
 Novelty, 140  
  
 Objectivity, concrete, 188-193  
 Obligation, 170  
 Opportunity, 19  
 Organism, 236f.  
 Ostracism, 14  
 Other, -ness, 35ff., 93f., 193  
 Otherworldliness, 35, 178,  
     203  
     *See also* Detachment  
  
 Paradise, 148  
 Paradox, 139, 188, 220, 224  
 Parapsychology, 29  
 Patmore, C., 127f.  
 Perfection, 7  
 Pessimism, 9, 12, 96, 153, 176,  
     223  
 Philosophy, 143-151, 221  
 Physicalism, 53, 60  
 Physical object, 51  
 Physical world, 81  
 Plato, 43, 47, 94, 104, 105,  
     110, 174, 188, 205-215, 218  
 Play, 121, 138  
 Pleasure, 159f., 176, 201, 247  
 Positivism, 28, 30, 156  
 Possibility, 39, 67, 74, 175  
 Potentiality, 84  
 Powers, 67f.  
 Pragmatism, 149f., 160, 171,  
     175, 214, 223  
 Primitive, 41, 150-154  
 Probability, 3, 30, 97  
 Proof, 4, 31, 32, 97, 205  
 Psyche, *see* Soul  
 Psychiatry, 146, 167  
 Psychology, 6, 8, 60-85, 148,  
     164-168  
 Ptah Hotep, 176  
 Puritan, 121, 221  
 Purpose, 238f.  
     *See also* End  
  
 Quality, 98  
  
 Real, -ity, 57, 60, 109f., 190,  
     209, 217  
 Realism, 33, 57, 100, 174,  
     217-230  
     *See also* Naturalism  
 Reason, 145  
 Reflective self, 72, 216

- Relativity, 104f.  
 Relativity of values, 187  
 Religion, 112  
 Renaissance, 184  
 Repetition, 140, 153  
 Repression, 67, 70  
 Rest, 95  
 Right to endure, 7f., 104, 111  
  
 Sanity, 15, 120, 145-163  
 Science and meaning, 161-163, 164-173  
 Scientific method, 29, 42, 112, 181, 184  
     *See also* Empiricism  
 Self, 33, 62-85, 237f.  
     *See also* Soul, Individual  
 Self-consciousness, 60, 61, 108, 252f.  
 Self-enjoyment, *see* Enjoyment  
 Self-making, 79, 83, 90f., 208f.  
 Self-preservation, 118  
 Sense-data, 52, 54  
 Simultaneity, 76  
 Sin, 13, 121, 177  
 Social objectivity, 18, 86  
 Soul, 49, 130, 215f.  
 Space, 36, 37ff., 68f.  
 Speculation, 29f., 115, 255  
 Spotwise satisfaction, 157, 171, 182, 183, 221  
 Stability, 171  
 State, 106  
 Stoicism, 177-180  
 Subconscious, 65, 85, 107, 122, 224  
 Substance, 82, 110, 154  
 Succession, 76  
  
 Suicide, 25  
 Suffering, 96, 177f.  
     *See also* Evil, Pessimism  
 Supernatural, 34, 172, 175, 192  
 Superstition, 136  
 Survival, 193f., 218  
  
 Tagore, 25f.  
 Tahiti, 120, 151  
 Thought and Value, 145-163, 221  
 Time, 19, 75, 199  
 Timeless, 29, 78  
 Tolstoi, 12  
  
 Union of opposites, 71, 74  
 Unity of self, 64, 170  
 Universal, 90, 149, 155, 188f.  
     *See also* General and Particular  
  
 Value, 28, 94f., 98f., 105, 128-130, 147, 253f.  
 Value-certainty, 252  
 Value in particulars, 149, 157  
 Verification, 171  
  
 War, 124f.  
 Whole-meaning, 158-162, 171, 188f., 254  
 Willingness to die, 20-25, 86  
 Wishful thinking, 5, 7  
 Work, 124  
 Worship, 122  
  
 Yoga, 177  
  
 Zen, 177













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